

THE ARGOSY.

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PEACE WITH HONOUR.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

HARDLY WON.

UNFORTUNATELY, the Major Sahib, not knowing all the circumstances of the case, did not look at things quite in the same light that Rahah did, and Georgia was not left long in doubt as to his view of the matter. Betaking herself to the terrace outside her room at the hour when she usually carried on her heliographic communications with Fitz, she was surprised to find that the conversation was opened by a complicated series of flashes in such rapid succession that she could not read them off.

"It can't be Mr. Anstruther," she said to herself; "he never begins in that way. Can it be Dick who is doing it? It looks like some kind of private signal—or it might be 'Attention!' flashed very fast. Oh, here is the message!"

But the perplexity on her face did not lighten when she had written down the words, for their tone was not of the pleasantest.

"Get your things ready at once. I am coming to fetch you.
"DICK."

Was the victory to be snatched from her when it was so nearly within her grasp? Georgia set her teeth hard as she flashed back—

"Cannot possibly leave to-night. Come for me in the morning.
"GEORGIA."

The answer came quickly.

"I am starting immediately, and shall expect to find you ready."

This was a little too much. Georgia's calmness, which had been subjected to a considerable strain already by the excitements of the day, gave way altogether, and with a hand that trembled a good deal she signalled back:

"I must beg you not to come, as I decline to start to-night."

Then, repenting of the wording of her message, she added, "I am longing to see you, but it is absolutely impossible for me to come before to-morrow morning."

This time no answer arrived, but after a while, during which she stood watching anxiously, and wondering whether Dick was actually on his way to fetch her, she saw a solitary flash. This was the sign that Fitz was beginning operations, and she signalled at once,

"What is Major North doing?"

"Gone to his quarters," came the answer, "in a vile temper. Excuse me, but this is true. Looks seedy, too, but he brought a surgeon with his detachment, so don't worry about him."

"Please tell him from me——" began Georgia, but the flashes came again—

"He won't let me in. Stratford is calling me. I must go."

Georgia left the heliograph with a sigh, for it was growing too late to catch the sunlight properly, and this evening she had a hard piece of work before her, the very crown and object, indeed, of her visit to Bir-ul-Malikat. Returning to Zeynab's room, she found Khadija sitting crouched in her usual attitude upon the divan, and addressed her :

"I have performed my promise, Khadija. Zeynab's foot is getting on well, and needs only proper treatment and careful dressing, so that it is quite safe for me to return to Bir-ul-Malik to-morrow. I have shown the slave-girl Bilkis how to dress the wound, and I will send her over a good supply of lint and bandages and the other things I use, so that she may continue the treatment. She can do the work as well as I can, if she has the right materials. Now I am come to claim my reward. Give it to me, and let us go in peace."

"What was it that I promised thee?" asked Khadija slowly, when Rahah had translated her mistress's words.

"The antidote for the poison they call the Father of sleep, and the directions for applying it," said Georgia promptly.

"Ah, the antidote! It is well; I have it here," and Khadija drew a small square box from one corner of her ample veil, which was tied up in a knot. "Take it, O doctor-lady, and may it succeed in thy hands!"

"Is this all that is necessary?" asked Georgia, opening the box, and finding in it only a small quantity of flaky white powder.

"I swear to thee that it is all thou canst need."

"And how is it to be applied?"

"Nay; I made no promise to tell thee that." Khadija's sharp little eyes gleamed cunningly.

"Very well, Khadija; then I shall remain here, and Yakub at Bir-ul-Malik, and my friends there will send a message to Fath-ud-Din at Kubbet-ul-Haj."

"Nay; I was but joking, O doctor-lady. Thou shalt do as I bid thee," and Georgia noted down the details of what sounded like a rude

Turkish bath, repeated three or four times, and varied by the administration of copious draughts of a decoction made with the powder in the box.

"And you are sure that you have given me all that is necessary for effecting a cure?" asked Georgia suspiciously, for the powder possessed no healing qualities that were perceptible either to sight, smell or taste.

"O doctor-lady, I have given thee all. I swear it to thee by——" and Khadija ran glibly through a catalogue of sacred persons and objects, followed by an even more solemn list of divine names. Still Georgia was not satisfied. She looked helplessly at Rahah, for she could not hit upon any method of convicting Khadija of her falsehood, if falsehood there was. But Rahah was equal to the occasion.

"I will make her tell the truth, O my lady. Lay thy hand on the head of the child Zeynab, O Khadija, and swear as I shall bid thee."

"O doctor-lady! O my nurse! let it not be on my head!" expostulated Zeynab in a terrified voice, as Khadija rose reluctantly.

"Dear child, it can't hurt you," said Georgia. "It is merely a form."

"Nay," said Rahah, "it is rather that if any evil befalls thee, it is through Khadija's lies, and by her fault. Go to the other side of the room, O my lady. Stoop down, O Khadija; lay thy hand here, and say after me, 'If I have told lies to the doctor-lady, and have not given her all that I have promised, and if the Envoy cannot be cured by the medicine she holds in her hand, then let a curse light upon this child. May she wither away in her youth, and not live to see her marriage night. May the disgrace of her father ever continue and increase, and his name be blotted out without a son to bear it after him. May the house that should have mated with princes fall and perish in dishonour, and may all that remain of it live only to shame it.'"

"O my nurse, let not the curse light upon me!" sobbed Zeynab.

"Be quiet, O daughter of iniquity!" said Khadija angrily, and laying her hand on the child's head with a menacing pressure, she repeated the words after Rahah. Zeynab made no further protest, but lay still, looking white and frightened, greatly to the concern of Georgia. She regretted deeply that she had allowed Rahah to make so solemn an attempt to work upon the superstitious fears of the old woman, and urged her to withdraw the curse, lest the thought of it should do Zeynab harm, but Rahah refused stoutly.

"I cannot withdraw it, O my lady. Khadija has invoked it, and if she was trying to deceive thee, she knew the danger she was bringing upon the child. If she has dealt with us honestly, all will yet be well; but if evil befalls her master's house, we shall know that it was her own doing."

"You are certainly not so well to-night, Zeynab," said Georgia laying her hand on the child's forehead as she prepared to leave her

at bedtime. "Is anything the matter? Surely you are not thinking of those foolish words? I am very sorry that I let Rahah say them, but they can't do you any harm."

The child made no answer, but looked up with a frightened face, and Rahah translated Georgia's first remark for the benefit of Khadija. The old woman sprang up from the divan instantly, in a towering rage, and after a hasty glance at Zeynab, turned upon Georgia and Rahah, and drove them out of the room with a storm of curses, alleging that they had bewitched the child in order to frighten her. When they reached their own room, Georgia was inclined to be low-spirited over the issue of her mission, but her maid displayed no signs of discouragement.

"Wait!" she said mysteriously, and they waited, taking the opportunity of putting their things together in view of the return to Bir-ul-Malik the next day. They had been in their room about an hour, when the jingling of anklets along the passage, and a hurried knock at the door, announced a visitor. Rahah opened the door cautiously, and Khadija entered and walked up to Georgia.

"Give me the medicine," she said abruptly, and taking from her bosom a small phial, half filled with a clear colourless liquid, she emptied the powder into it from the box, shook up the resultant mixture, and closing the phial, handed it back to Georgia.

"Take it, O doctor-lady," she said. "But for the curse, thou shouldst never have had it. But truly God is great, and He is good to the accursed English, so that the old spells and the magic of our fathers cannot stand before theirs. And now come and take away the curse from my Rose of the World, for I cannot see her fade and die before my eyes."

Followed by Rahah, Georgia returned to Zeynab's room, where they found the child tossing restlessly on her bed.

"O my nurse, take it away!" was her cry. "I feel the curse; I know it has come upon me. I cannot sleep. There is a weight on my heart, and a fire in my bones, and it is thou that art killing me."

"The curse is gone, my dove," said Khadija. "I have given the rest of the medicine to the doctor-lady."

"But how can I believe thee? I feel no better," moaned Zeynab.

"O doctor-lady, wilt thou still kill my child?" cried the old woman in a frenzy. "I could give thee no more if she were dying at this moment. Take away from her thy curse and thy evil enchantments."

Sitting down beside the bed, Georgia took the hot little hands in one of hers, and with the other smoothed back the tangled hair from the child's brow. It was more than an hour before all her stories and her talk could banish the haunting horror from Zeynab's mind, and induce her to close her bright eyes, and her doctor was nearly worn out when she was at last able to leave her. Sheer fatigue made Georgia sleep, in spite of the excitement of the past day, and she and Rahah were not disturbed again that night. In the morning Fitz

flashed an inquiry as to the time at which she would like to be fetched from Bir-ul-Malikat, and about eleven o'clock she saw the cavalcade she was expecting enter the courtyard. There was a hurried collecting together of packages, a hasty farewell to Zeynab, who wept copiously, and would not be comforted even by the promise that she should receive every picture-paper Georgia could lay her hands on, and then, accompanied by Khadija, the visitors went down to the courtyard. To Georgia's surprise and disappointment, it was Stratford and Fitz who came eagerly to meet her as she appeared at the door shrouded in her *burka*.

"Where is Dick? He is not ill, is he?" she asked anxiously of Stratford, remembering Fitz's message of the night before.

"He is so busy that he was obliged to send his apologies, and allow us the honour of escorting you instead of coming to fetch you himself," said Stratford, in tones which were absolutely devoid of any suggestion of ulterior meaning.

"Oh!" said Georgia blankly.

"He found himself compelled to hold a full-dress review of his detachment, or inspect their kits, or do stables, or something complicated and professional of that kind," said Fitz, with a dogged resentment aggressively conspicuous in his manner.

"Nonsense, Anstruther! You know as well as I do that he would have allowed nothing but absolute necessity to keep him from coming," said Stratford.

"Oh yes, of course," said Georgia, in the most natural voice she could command. She would not let it be seen that she perceived the flimsy character of the excuse, but she felt deeply mortified as she allowed Stratford to mount her on her horse, and she resented his evident determination to smooth things over almost more than Fitz's undisguised incredulity. "How horrid of Dick!" was what she said to herself as she gathered up the reins, and the hot tears rose to her eyes under the shadow of the *burka*.

"Stay, Englishman!" cried Khadija from the doorstep, when Stratford, having seen Rahah and the luggage safely bestowed, was about to mount his own horse. "Where is Yakub, my son, whom I left at Bir-ul-Malik as a pledge for the safe return of the doctor-lady?"

"I hope that Yakub will come back to you safe and sound in a few days," returned Stratford in Ethiopian, speaking so carefully that it was evident he had studied his sentences with Kustendjian before starting. "For the present, however, I think it well to detain him, on my own responsibility. We don't want any mistakes made about that medicine for the Envoy. As soon as he has recovered, you shall have your son back."

For answer, Khadija threw herself upon the ground, wailing and tearing her hair and beating her breast, and calling upon Heaven and upon Georgia to witness that she had performed all that was required

of her, and that she had given her all the necessary ingredients for the medicine. Georgia, remembering the scene in Zeynab's room the night before, and indignant at being compelled to take part in what was not far removed from a breach of faith, espoused her cause, and joined her in demanding that Yakub should be at once released. In spite, however, of all that she could say, Stratford remained immovable, and mounting his horse, ordered an immediate start. But before the horses had gone more than a few steps, Khadija rose from the ground, and forcing her way through the escort, caught hold of Georgia's rein.

"O doctor-lady," she cried, with such reluctance that she seemed to be almost torn in two by the conflicting passions in her mind, "I had forgotten one thing. After the first administration of the medicine, the sick man will sleep for two days and two nights a natural sleep. If he is awakened in that time he will die, but if he awakes of himself, all will be well. And now"—her tone changed suddenly—"now go thy way, O thrice accursed daughter of an accursed father, and when first thy bridegroom looks upon thy face on thy wedding-night, may he turn his back on thee and say, 'O woman, I divorce thee!' and so thrust thee out."

"Come, that's enough," said Stratford peremptorily, loosening her hand from the rein. "You know now that it depends on yourself whether your son returns to you in safety or not. Has Anstruther told you, Miss Keeling, that we had a messenger from Jahan Beg the day before yesterday?"

"No, I had not heard of it," returned Georgia, following his example in ignoring the baffled Khadija, who stood shaking her fist and shrieking curses after the party. "What news did he bring?"

"The best news possible. Jahan Beg has succeeded in unearthing the conspirators who were troubling him when we left the city, and has made it impossible for them, at any rate, to do more plotting. Among other things, he discovered that they meant to stop us and keep us here in order to get hold of the treaty, and therefore he sent stringent orders to Abd-ur-Rahim to let us go at once with all our property, on pain of death. Messengers were also sent to all the towns and forts on the road and along the frontier, ordering the governors on no account to oppose the advance of any English relieving force coming from Khemistan, but to afford it every assistance, as if they didn't Fath-ud-Din would suffer. That accounts for North's getting back to us so quickly."

"How far had he to go?" asked Georgia.

"Only as far as Rahmat-Ullah, for Hicks had got there before him, and frightened the Government about us a good deal, so that they had already ordered up a couple of troops of the Khemistan Horse, in addition to those usually stationed at the fort, and as soon as they arrived, he started back with them. Of course such a small force would have been no use if the country had been up, but it was

intended merely as an armed escort, just to make a dash for Bir-ul-Malik and back to Rahmat-Ullah."

"Then they must have travelled very fast," said Georgia, her mind reverting to her glimpse of Dick the day before.

"Yes, they made forced marches all the way. North kept them at it, but he looks awfully done-up now," said the wily Stratford.

"It would have done him good to ride out here," said Georgia, refusing to commit herself.

"Yes, but you know how conscientious he is. So long as there is anything to be done, he will simply work till he drops."

"Oh dear, I do hope he isn't going to be ill!" sighed Georgia, and Stratford judged that his scheme had succeeded. He guessed rightly, for all the resentment in Georgia's mind was swallowed up in anxiety, and she could not spare a thought for her own insulted dignity when Dick was suffering, perhaps had even endangered his life, through his eagerness to rescue her. She said little during the remainder of the ride, and could scarcely devote a moment even to glancing at the camp of the Khemistan Horse, which was pitched beside the hill of Bir-ul-Malik. Arrived at the palace, she bestowed a hasty greeting on Kustendjian and Ismail Baksh, and hurried into the harem in search of Lady Haigh, who rushed to meet her, and in the intervals of kissing and crying over her, scolded her soundly for her persistence in remaining away.

"But I have got the antidote!" cried Georgia, exhibiting the little bottle proudly; "and remember, Lady Haigh, you promised that I should use it."

"How could I prevent your trying it, my dear child, when you risked your life in obtaining it? But it was not even your danger that I was thinking about so much at the moment. It was Major North, and his view of the case."

"Oh, Dick and I must settle our little differences together," said Georgia, as lightly as she could. "Where is he? I haven't seen him yet."

"I think I hear his step outside," said Lady Haigh. "He must have followed you into the house. But, Georgie, I must warn you, he looks very seedy, and I think he is just a little bit cross. Don't be harder on him than you can help, dear, for he has had a fearfully anxious time. He has got very little sleep since he left here, and has been at work night and day, almost without a rest."

If Lady Haigh considered it advisable to offer her this warning, Georgia judged that Dick's fit of ill-temper must be of an extremely pronounced character; but her conscience was clear, although her heart beat a little faster than usual as she left Lady Haigh in the inner room, and went out into the larger one. Dick was leaning against the framework of the lattice, and raised himself slowly to greet her.

"Oh, Dick, how ill you look!" she cried. "My dear boy, you ought to be in bed."

As soon as the words had passed her lips, she was struck by their singularly malapropos character under the circumstances, and Dick frowned heavily.

"Well, Georgia?" was all he said.

"Why, Dick, have you nothing more to say to me than that? Do you know that you haven't seen me for more than a week?"

"I was under the impression that you might have seen me yesterday evening, and preferred not to do so."

"But I couldn't help that. It was not a matter of choice. One can't leave a patient before his cure is fairly complete."

"You prefer your patient to me, then?"

"To see you would have been a pleasure, to stay there was a duty."

"Even when I had desired you to come back at once?"

"That couldn't alter my duty."

"Indeed?" Dick lifted his eyebrows. "Then my wishes have no weight with you whatever?"

"They have great weight with me, but mine ought to have just as much with you."

"This is rather a new theory," said Dick, with elaborate politeness. "Is its application intended to be permanent, or only temporary?"

"I see no reason to anticipate anything that would render it out of date."

"Thank you. That's pretty clear, at any rate. Perhaps you will kindly explain to me your views of the marriage relationship? So far as I can see, they involve two heads of one house."

"I don't want to discuss the question now, especially since we used to argue it so often in the old days," said Georgia; "but if you insist upon it, I will. I know very well that there can be only one head, practically, to a household—that when two people ride one horse, one must ride behind—and because I love you and trust you, I am quite willing to take the second place. But I do expect to be consulted as to the way the horse is to go. You could never have thought that I would allow myself to be carried off anywhere blind-fold. I think that we should discuss everything together, and agree upon our course, and, if at any time circumstances should prevent our discussing some special plan, I expect you to trust me if I find it necessary to act on my own responsibility, just as I should be ready to trust you in a like case."

"This is the New Woman's idea of marriage!" sneered Dick.

"It is my view of it, at any rate. Did you expect to find in me a slave without any will of her own, Dick? I am not a young girl, but a woman, who has led a sufficiently lonely and independent life, and you knew that when you asked me to marry you."

"Yes, and I was a fool to do it," said Dick roughly.

Georgia turned away, deeply wounded, and he stood at the lattice, looking out over the desert with gloomy eyes. She did not know that more had happened to try his temper than even the hardships and

anxiety of which Lady Haigh had spoken. An ill-advised comrade, who had heard of his engagement through Mr. Hicks, had seen fit to chaff him that morning on the eagerness with which he had pressed forward to rescue a lady who neither wanted his help nor desired his presence, and the words had rankled in his mind. But, although Georgia was ignorant of this fact, she could not bear to leave things in their present state. To take offence at his hasty speech, and break off her engagement there and then, would be a course of conduct worthy only of a mythical lady who always acted the part of an awful warning for Georgia and her friends, and whom they were in the habit of calling "The Early Victorian Female." It is, perhaps, needless to add that this person was given to gushing over indifferent poetry, fainted with great regularity at the most inconvenient moments, and was totally destitute of the advantages of the higher culture, and Georgia felt it morally impossible to imitate her. To what purpose had been her own education and her experience of life if they did not enable her to stoop to conquer, and to hold her own without being aggressive? Was all that had passed between her and Dick to be blotted out by a few words spoken in a moment of irritation? She crossed the room to his side, and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Look at me, Dick," she said. But Dick would not turn round.

"You goad a man into saying beastly things to you," he muttered, "and then you try and get round him when he is feeling ashamed of himself!"

Such an unpromising reception of her efforts at making peace might well have daunted Georgia, but she could forgive much to Dick, simply because he was Dick. She turned his moody face towards hers, and made him look at her.

"Don't think of it any more, Dick," she said. "My dear boy, do you imagine I don't care for you enough to forgive you that? And let us leave the question of our married life to right itself. If it hadn't been for this, we should have glided into it naturally, and things would have settled themselves. Surely two people who are not by nature quarrelsome, and who are both anxious to do right, ought to be able to get on together, if both are willing to give and take? I can trust you, Dick; won't you trust me?"

It added considerably to the discomfort of Dick's present state of mind that he was conscious that Georgia was behaving with a magnanimity to which he could lay no claim, but he had started with the determination to put his foot down, and to show Georgia before their marriage that he would stand no nonsense, and he stuck to his point doggedly. "I don't intend to be made to look a fool before all the world," he growled.

"But who would want to make you look a fool? You must know that your honour is as dear to me as to yourself. Haven't I shown that I won't keep you back when duty calls you? Can't you trust me, Dick? If you can't, things had better be over between us,

indeed. Suppose you were out, and I was summoned to a dangerous case, and couldn't possibly let you know. It would be my duty to go, just as it would be yours to start if you were ordered somewhere on special service, and couldn't even say good-bye to me. Can't we act on this understanding?"

"But how can you be sure that you can trust me, may I ask? Many men make rash promises before marriage, and break them like a shot afterwards. How do you know that I am not one of them?"

"Oh, not you, Dick! You are a gentleman; I can trust you fully. Tell me that you will agree, and let us forget all this worry."

"You are trying to get round me," said Dick again, helplessly. "I can't think what I was going to say; everything seems to have gone out of my head. What is the matter?" looking irritably at her frightened face. "There's nothing wrong with me. I think—things had better be—over between us, Georgie. We should never—agree. What was I saying last? What's the matter with the walls? Is it—an earthquake?"

He was reeling as he stood, and clutching wildly at the frame of the lattice for support. Georgia caught him by the arm, for he had missed his hold, and was swaying backwards and forwards, and succeeded in guiding him to the divan.

"I feel—awfully queer," he said, and fainted away before Georgia could seek a restorative. She cried out, and Lady Haigh and Rahah came rushing in, the latter followed by Dick's bearer, whose countenance declared plainly that he considered his master's illness to be entirely due to Georgia, and that it was just what he had expected. With the help of some of the other servants, Dick was carried to his own room, where for several days he was to lie moaning and tossing with a bad attack of fever. Georgia had her hands full during this period, even though the bearer respectfully declined to allow her any share in the actual nursing, for besides her care for Dick, she was engaged in testing, with scarcely less anxiety, the effect upon Sir Dugald's health of the antidote she had obtained with so much difficulty. She would have preferred to choose a time when she could give her whole attention to his case, but he had appeared so much weaker of late that Lady Haigh was feverishly anxious for the remedy to be tried at once, and in fear and trembling Georgia put into practice the directions she had received from Khadija. Her courage revived to a certain extent when she found that the resulting symptoms corresponded exactly with those described by the old woman, but the two days of heavy slumber proved to be a period of intense anxiety. Every sound was hushed in the neighbourhood of Sir Dugald's sick room, and the watchers scarcely dared to move or breathe. At last, just as Georgia had returned from a heart-breaking visit to Dick, who was calling on her constantly, although he refused to recognise her when she stood beside him, there was a sudden movement on the part of the patient, and Lady Haigh grasped her arm convulsively.

"Go to him, and let him see you first when he wakes," said Georgia in a low whisper, and Lady Haigh obeyed.

"Well, Elma!" It was Sir Dugald's voice, very weak, but without a hint of delirium. "Haven't you got the place rather dark?"

Georgia threw the lattice partly open, and he looked round.

"Still at Kubbet-ul-Haj, I see." They had purposely arranged the bed and the camp-furniture in the same positions that they had occupied in his room at the Mission, with the object of avoiding a sudden shock. "I have had the most extraordinary dreams. Could it have been a touch of fever, do you think? But is that Miss Keeling? Ah, this explains it. I must have been ill?"

"Yes, you have frightened us all very much, Sir Dugald," said Georgia, for Lady Haigh was incapable of speech.

"Ah, it was a bad attack, then, was it? Queer that I don't remember feeling it coming on. The treaty is not signed yet, I suppose?"

"Yes, it is signed. You have been ill for some time—longer than you think."

"I always knew Stratford was a clever fellow. This is the best news you could have brought me, Miss Keeling. But we ought to be thinking of returning to Khemistan if we have secured the treaty. How long do you give me to get well enough to mount a horse again?"

"You mustn't be in too great a hurry. We might carry you in a litter."

"No, thank you. It would be too much like my dreams. I have suffered agonies through imagining that I was in a trance, and about to be buried alive, because they thought I was dead. It seemed to me that I could see people moving about all round me, but I could not move, or speak, or feel. Then I was put in a coffin, and carried off to be buried. It always ended there, but it came over and over again. It was the horrible helplessness—my absolute powerlessness to make any sign to show that I was alive—which was the worst thing about it."

"Oh, Dugald!" cried Lady Haigh in a strangled voice, and kissing him hastily, she hurried out of the room.

"Lady Haigh has been very anxious about you, Sir Dugald," said Georgia. "She has watched over you night and day, and I have often wondered that she did not break down."

"Please look after her," he said anxiously. "She has wonderful pluck, but sometimes she is obliged to give way altogether, and I'm afraid from what you say that she must be quite overdone."

Georgia left the room, and found Lady Haigh sobbing on the divan outside, with her face buried in a cushion that Sir Dugald might not hear her. Sitting down beside her, Georgia began to cry too, out of pure sympathy, until Lady Haigh suddenly choked back her sobs, and throwing her arms round her, cried :

"Oh, Georgie, Georgie, you have given me back my husband, and it has cost you Major North!"

"You mustn't think of that. There ought to be a change in Dick's state before long."

"Georgie, I will nurse him night and day—every moment that I can spare from Sir Dugald, that is. And if I can't put things right between you when he is better, I'll—I'll——"

"But what if he doesn't want things put right?" asked Georgia sadly.

* * * * *

When Dick recovered consciousness, after a very long and fatiguing dream, in which many people and events had played more or less inappropriate parts, he found himself in bed, with a cold bandage on his forehead, and a feeling all over him that he had lost more strength than he had ever possessed. There was some one in the room, and he gathered that it was Lady Haigh. She was speaking to some one else at the door.

"I will leave him to you, then, Georgie. He is beautifully asleep still, and I have just changed the bandage."

The door closed softly, and Dick was aware that Lady Haigh had gone out and that the other person had come in, and was sitting just out of his sight as he lay in bed. That was not what he wanted, and he tried painfully to turn his head in her direction. She was at his side in a moment.

"Are you tired of lying in that position?" she asked. "Shall I help you to turn over?"

"Not if you will sit where I can see you," he answered, and his voice sounded to himself weak and far-away. Georgia changed her place as he wished, but she took up the book she had been reading and went on with it.

"Why won't you speak to me, Georgie?" he asked querulously.

"Because you are forbidden to talk until you are a little stronger."

"I don't care! Put down that book, and sit nearer me."

"No," said Georgia with decision. "You are not to excite yourself with talking. Lie still, and try to go to sleep."

"Why do you talk to me like that? I haven't done anything to make you angry with me, have I? Why are you so unkind?"

"I don't want to be unkind," returned Georgia hastily; "but you really ought not to talk. I will answer any number of questions when you are better."

"But why won't you call me Dick? We didn't quarrel, did we? I have a sort of idea—— But my head was awfully queer, and I daresay I talked a lot of rot. I can't apologise properly until I remember more about it. But, if we quarrelled, why are you here looking after me like this?"

"Simply and solely as your medical adviser." There was the slightest possible suspicion of triumph in Georgia's tone, the reason

for which Dick did not perceive until afterwards. She returned to her book, and he lay and looked at her in a puzzled kind of way.

"I wish you would take my temperature!" he said at last.

"What, are you feverish again?" she asked anxiously, getting out her thermometer as she rose and came towards him.

"I don't know; but I remember you were doing it once when I was just about half awake, and I liked it. You put your arm under my head."

"If you will talk so much, I shall call Lady Haigh."

"But do take my temperature! I thought sick people always had everything they wanted?"

"Everything in reason. Patients are expected not to trouble their doctors unnecessarily. Now try to go to sleep." And Georgia returned the thermometer resolutely to its case.

"Would it be considered a thing in reason if a patient asked his doctor to give him a kiss? What would the doctor say?"

"That anything of the kind would be highly unprofessional."

"Well, this patient," said Dick weakly, "refuses to try to go to sleep unless his doctor acts in that unprofessional way."

And his doctor did.

CHAPTER XXIV.

VIS MEDICATRIX.

"GEORGIE," said Lady Haigh, some two or three days later, "I want to ask you a question. Are you still engaged to Major North, or not?"

The shadow of a smile glimmered on Georgia's lips.

"It seems a ridiculous thing to say, but really I haven't the smallest idea whether I am or not," she answered.

"But what does Major North think about it?"

"I believe he is under the impression that we are still engaged. That is what makes the matter doubtful, for I should certainly say that we were not."

"But how long is this state of things to go on?"—impatiently.

"I don't know. Happily I have never had an engagement-ring, so that no one can notice any difference."

"My dear, this must be put a stop to!" said Lady Haigh, with conviction. "Now that Major North is so much better, there is no need for you to pretend that two doctor's visits a day are necessary. Once a day is quite enough for the present, and then you can drop it altogether."

"Oh, Lady Haigh! But he looks out for me so eagerly, and is so glad to see me. And I like to see him, too."

"You mustn't make yourself too cheap, my dear Georgie. Surely

you would not wish to cling to a man who has told you in so many words that he is anxious to break off his engagement with you?"

"Oh, but I don't think he meant it!"

"Then he has nothing to do but to say so. You had far better bring about an explanation, and have it over. It is certainly Major North's turn to eat humble pie, and it will do him a world of good, and smooth your path very much in the future. Take my advice, dear, and let him see (or at any rate think) that you are prepared to abide by what he said."

It was with great reluctance that Georgia consented to listen to her friend's counsel; but when she thought it over its wisdom commended itself to her, and she decided to carry it out rigorously, with results which seemed very hard to Dick. He only saw his doctor once a day, and even then she persisted in ignoring sternly all his efforts to extend the scope of the conversation beyond the business in hand. Then she left off coming altogether, and the only explanation his bearer could offer was that the Doctor Miss Sahiba was very busy, and he supposed that she took no more interest in the protector of the poor now that he was so much better. It was the same when Stratford and Fitz came to see him. They agreed that Miss Keeling was very busy, and seemed rather surprised that he should ask after her. It even appeared to him that there was a slight constraint in their manner when they answered his questions. Dick pondered over the mystery without result for two days, and then announced that he was going to get up, and demanded his clothes. The bearer had anticipated this step, and replied promptly that the entire wardrobe of the protector of the poor was at the moment in the hands of a tailor in the town, to whom he had entrusted it for needed repairs. He invited his master's reproofs for his own remissness in postponing the operation for so long, but to his dismay discovered that Dick declined to be drawn into a tirade on the vices of bearers in general, illustrated from his own experience of this particular specimen. He was too much in earnest in his determination to have time to waste in useless altercations, and, moreover, he knew his man.

"Ask the *chota sahib* to come to me," he said. "I will borrow a suit of his clothes."

The bearer looked blank.

"But the *chota sahib*'s clothes will not fit my lord," he objected.

"That doesn't signify," said Dick. "Fit or no fit, I am going to get up," and he only smiled in secret when the bearer returned after a short absence with one of his own suits, and announced that the tailor had brought it back unexpectedly soon. He found himself much weaker than he had believed as he dressed, but he disregarded the bearer's doleful prognostications that he would kill himself, and declined to return to his couch, although he was glad to accept the support of the servant's arm as he crossed the hall and entered the

passage leading into the harem. Lady Haigh, writing her home letters busily at a camp-table (for letter-writing had somehow been dropped during those past days, when it seemed unlikely that either the letters or their writers would ever reach home), looked up in astonishment when he came in, and made haste to arrange a comfortable place for him with cushions upon the divan, remarking that he had better lie still and rest for a little, and not talk. But this was not what Dick had come for.

"Lady Haigh, where is Georgie?" he asked, the moment that the bearer had departed.

"Well, I think she is busy just now," Lady Haigh replied, with some embarrassment. As a matter of fact, at that moment Georgia was sitting outside on the terrace with Sir Dugald, who had by this time been promoted to a knowledge of the whereabouts of his party, and entertaining him with an account of her visit to Bir-ul-Malikat and of the charms of Khadija.

"Every person that I have asked about her for the last three days has told me exactly that!" said Dick, with a good deal of indignation in his tone. "I should like to see her, if you please," he went on, in the voice of one determined to obtain his just rights.

"I assure you that I have not got her locked up," said Lady Haigh, with some tartness. "I will tell her what you say, if you like, but I must say that after all that has happened——"

"What is the good of tormenting me like this, Lady Haigh?" asked Dick impatiently, raising himself on his elbow. "I know that Georgia must be ill—I suppose she fell ill through overtiring herself in nursing me—and you are all doing your best to keep it from me. I insist on knowing what is the matter with her, and how she is. I have a right to know."

"Indeed?" said Lady Haigh. "I was not aware of that. But you are mistaken in supposing that Miss Keeling is ill. I am glad to say she is quite well."

"Then what is the matter? Why are you keeping her away from me like this? What has come between us?"

"Really, Major North, you are a little inconsistent. Why you should accuse me of trying to separate Miss Keeling and yourself, I don't know. I can only suppose that your illness has caused you to forget the trifling fact that your engagement is broken off."

Dick stared at her in astonishment and dismay.

"I don't remember," he murmured. "She said something about a quarrel, but it was nothing after all. When did she do it? What had I done?"

"Pray don't try to put it on Miss Keeling. You told her yourself that things had better be over between you."

"I must have been mad," said Dick despairingly, "or am I dreaming now?" He pinched his arm to assure himself that he was awake, then looked round the room in a vain search for explanation,

until his gaze rested again on Lady Haigh, but he found no comfort in her face. "You wouldn't humbug me on such a subject, Lady Haigh!" he cried, as he met her accusing glance. "You helped me once before; tell me what to do now. She can't think I really meant it!"

"So far as I know, you explained your views pretty clearly," said Lady Haigh, rejoicing to find Dick delivered into her hands in this way, and hoping devoutly that Georgia would remain outside and out of hearing. "You mustn't play fast and loose like this, Major North. Why did you say what you didn't mean?"

"I don't know—I must have been angry. I have a beastly temper at times, you know. I suppose Georgia had made me very mad about something. Oh, yes, I remember now, it was about her going to Bir-ul-Malikat. She would insist that she had a right to go, and stay too, whether I liked it or not, and she wouldn't give in. But as for breaking off our engagement——"

"But you are convinced that Miss Keeling ought to have given in?"

"Well, I think that when she saw what a point I made of it——"

"There was no question of your giving in because she also made a point of it?"

"Oh, no," said Dick innocently.

"Then I think it is a very good thing indeed that your engagement is broken off." Lady Haigh spoke with her usual decision of manner, but Dick looked so absolutely astonished and appalled that she condescended to an explanation. "I should like to talk to you a little on this subject very seriously, Major North, for as a looker-on I can perhaps see more clearly than you do where you have gone wrong. I daresay you will regard me as a meddling old woman, but at any rate you can't say that I have turned critic because I have failed in matrimony, for my married life has been as happy as even I could have wished. Besides, it was in getting the medicine to cure Sir Dugald that poor Georgie incurred your royal highness's displeasure, so that I feel bound to do all I can to set her right in your eyes."

"But if you think that it is better for her not to be engaged to me?" The question was asked a little stiffly, for Dick did not altogether appreciate the tone of his mistress's remarks.

"That is a matter which depends solely on yourself. You have many estimable qualities, Major North, but you were born a few centuries too late. Of course I don't mean that you were to blame for the fact—on the contrary, it is distinctly a misfortune, both to yourself and others. You would have made an ideal husband in the days when it was customary for a gentleman to correct his wife with a stick not thicker than his middle finger."

"Really, Lady Haigh, this is beyond a joke!" Dick was angry now; there was no mistaking the fact.

"Quite so; but I am not joking. I don't mean that if you married Georgia, you would keep her in order with a horsewhip—I don't for

a moment believe she would let you, for one thing. But I think you would certainly need some resource of the kind to fall back upon if your ideal of domestic discipline was to be maintained. In your house, according to your theory, there would be one law and one will, and that law would be your law, and that will your will. That is a beautiful ideal—for you—and it would no doubt produce, in course of time, a saintly submissiveness of character in your wife. But any woman who is to be subjected to such a course of training ought to be warned beforehand, and agree to accept it with her eyes open. But that Georgia would never do."

"I don't know why she shouldn't. All women do."

"Do they?" asked Lady Haigh with as little sarcasm in her tone as the subject admitted, and Dick was silent, recognising that he had, to use his own phrase, given himself away. His counsellor went on. "I am going to ask you a personal question, Major North. Why do you want to marry Miss Keeling?"

"Because I love her, and I can't do without her," very gruffly.

"But why didn't you fall in love with that beautiful Miss Hervey, whom we met at Mrs. Egerton's before we came out here?"

"Because she is not my sort—an empty-headed doll!"

"Exactly; but if you want a woman without any mind or reason of her own, she would just suit you. She would adore you, and defer to all your wishes when they didn't clash with any particular desires of her own, for six months at least, and you would adore her, for the same length of time—until you each found the other out. After that, you would know that you had married a fool, and she a tyrant. Georgia is not a fool. She loves you, but she sees your faults, and she has some self-respect. If you wanted her to do anything that seemed to her unreasonable, she would talk it over with you, and she might end by refusing to do it, but she would never cry or sulk until you gave it up in despair. It is a great thing to recognise fully that you are both human beings, after all. Georgie doesn't imagine that the possession of the Victoria Cross necessarily implies that of all the domestic virtues, any more than she believes herself to be perfect because she possesses a London degree. She would consider that she had exactly as much right to be the sole arbiter of the house as you had, and that is none at all."

Dick murmured a feeble protest against this way of looking at things, to which Lady Haigh refused to listen.

"The fact is, you would wish to marry a clever woman, only she must be willing to let herself be treated like a fool. You can't reconcile two extremes in that way. Georgia has lived her own life, and that a very full and useful one, and you cannot expect her to become a puppet all at once, simply out of love for you. She is used to acting on her own initiative. Well, I will tell you what I learned from her maid, for she won't talk about it herself. Do you know that when she was at Bir-ul-Malikat, that wicked old woman Khadija tried to

get her to lead you and your men into a trap, on the pretence that by calling to you and beckoning you she would warn you of an ambuscade. An ordinary woman would have yielded to the impulse of the moment—I should have myself—and destroyed you, with the purest desire for your safety; but Georgie had the strength of mind to reason the matter out, all in an instant. She refused to call to you, and you were saved. And it is a woman like that whom you expect to fall down and worship your slightest whim!" with intense scorn.

"Not guilty, Lady Haigh. I abjure, I recant—anything! But why didn't you tell me before? What an ungrateful brute she must think me!"

"I didn't begin by telling you of it, because I wanted to make you see reason, instead of working upon your feelings. I'm sure I hope I may have done both."

"I will give you my solemn promise, if that will satisfy you, that Georgia shall ride roughshod over my most cherished convictions if she likes. She is a heroine. I feel ashamed to lift my eyes to her. Oh, Lady Haigh, tell me what to do. How can I begin to put things right?"

"Put yourself in her place. Would you like it if she expected you to give up your military career for her sake?"

"She would never ask or expect such a thing. She knows that I could not do it, even to please her."

"Then return the compliment. She is willing to give up for your sake any hope of distinguishing herself further in her profession by means of original research, but she will not relinquish the practice of it. Allow her the freedom you claim for yourself—in fact you must allow it, if you mean to marry Georgia Keeling. She will be yours heart and soul, but a certain portion of her time and interest she will always give to her work."

"But come now, Lady Haigh, doesn't that strike you as slightly rough on a man?"

"It strikes me as merely just," snapped Lady Haigh. "No portion of your time and interest will ever be given to your work, of course?"

"Oh, but that's different, you know," said Dick uncomfortably. "Do you really think that this sort of thing is meant for women?"

"My dear Major North, I am not holding a brief for Women's Rights. I am merely trying to bring you into line with facts. If you want arguments, no doubt Georgia will argue with you by the hour."

"I wish she was here to do it!" sighed Dick. "Would it be rude to remind you, Lady Haigh, that I haven't seen her for three whole days?"

"I suppose that means that you want me to fetch her for you,

Well, I will just say this. Once you lamented to me that you had no tact. Now I believe that, until she finds him out, a bad man with tact will make a woman happier than a good man without it." Lady Haigh paused triumphantly, as though to say, "Contradict that atrocious sentiment if you can!" but Dick made no attempt to do so, and she went on. "I'm afraid you would find it difficult to cultivate tact now, but if you will only try to consider things that affect Georgia from her point of view as well as your own, you will have made a good beginning."

She stepped out through the lattice, and presently Georgia entered, stethoscope in hand.

"Well, and how do we find ourselves to-day?" she asked cheerfully, hoping that Dick would not notice the trembling in her voice.

"How can you expect a patient to get better when his doctor does not come near him for days?"

"You have always expressed such a dislike to lady doctors that it struck us you might prefer to be without one."

"Ah, how did you come to be my doctor, by-the-bye?"

"I knew you would have preferred the surgeon who came with you," said Georgia, with resignation in her tone. "I will tell you how it was. He is very young and very new, and knows nothing about fever in practice, which makes him all the more sure about it in theory. He has half-a-dozen infallible remedies, and he was rejoicing at the prospect of being able to test them all on you, when I stepped in and claimed you as my patient. And now I suppose you will tell me that you would prefer to be killed by him rather than be cured by me?"

No suitable repartee occurring to Dick at that moment, he took a mean advantage of his position as an invalid, and lay back on his cushions with a slight groan, which melted Georgia's heart at once.

"You have a headache, and I have been teasing you!" she said remorsefully, changing her position and coming behind him. "Keep your head like that, my poor boy," and she began to pass her fingers slowly across his forehead with such a soothing effect that Dick only kept himself by a violent effort from falling asleep. Pulling her hands down, he looked at them critically.

"Have you been taking lessons in witchcraft from Khadija?" he asked. "Do you think it's fair to practise magic arts on me? What chance has a man when you begin to mesmerise him with those cool, firm fingers of yours? What nice soft hands you have, Georgie!" emphasising the remark by lifting the said hands to his lips.

"One has to keep one's hands nice for surgical work," said Georgia apologetically, and expecting an outburst. But Dick only gave a rather ostentatious sigh, and went on meditatively.

"Your magic is thoroughly successful, at any rate. Lady Haigh will testify to the change in my demeanour since you came in.

Well, Georgie, you have won. Let's make it up. I surrender at discretion."

"I begin to think that you are delirious again," said Georgia, in a puzzled voice, bending forward to look at him.

"I think not. I am merely anxious not to do things by halves. Come, make your conditions while I am in this softened state. As an honourable man, I shall feel bound to carry them out when I return to my right mind. I will only ask you, as you are strong, to be merciful. There, could submission go further than that?"

"You certainly are not fit to be sitting up. I shall call your bearer, and request him to see you back to bed. You may not be delirious, but you are undoubtedly queer in the head."

"Thank you. You will not call the respectable Hari Das at present—at any rate until I have had a longer talk with you."

"That sounds more like your usual self," said Georgia.

"The self which is to vanish from henceforth. Oh, Georgie, I know I'm talking like a lunatic, but it's because I should make a fool of myself if I didn't. When I think of what Lady Haigh has just been telling me, of the way in which you saved all our lives the other day, I feel as though I could simply die of shame. How could you—how could you—do it?"

"Pure selfishness," returned Georgia, with elaborate composure. "I couldn't do without you, you see."

"I'm not worth it, Georgie. I couldn't even behave decently to you an hour after it happened. And I daren't make any promises for the future, remembering all those I have broken already. But I do ask you to believe that I didn't know what I was saying when—when I proposed to break off our engagement the morning you came back. I couldn't have believed that even when I was off my head I could be such an idiot, but, unfortunately, you heard me say it. Take me on again, dearest. You'll have a lot to put up with, but—"

"My dear boy, I have never given you up—of my own free will, at any rate."

"That doesn't make it any better for me. After you had done a thing that not one woman in a million—or one man either—could have done—"

"Oh, yes, they could, if the idea had struck them. It was just that—a sudden inspiration. But you are getting excited, Dick, and I will not have it. As your medical attendant, I forbid you to think about Bir-ul-Malikat any more. I shall break off our re-engagement at once if you don't talk about something else."

"Yes, there it is. You have such an awful pull over me, Georgie. I can't do without you, but you could get on very well without me. Confess now—couldn't you?"

"By going back to England and joining the Forward Club, and impressing on the world that the grapes were sour?" asked Georgia.

"No, I should have to keep to my old plan, and settle down to missionary work in Khemistan; then I should get a glimpse of you sometimes."

"I don't know whether you call that a pure motive? Yes, I think I see myself riding past a Zenana hospital every day, and about once a week catching a distant view of you teaching a lot of native girls to roll up bandages."

"And I can imagine myself rushing to the verandah to look after you when you had passed!" said Georgia. "It would be a modern version of Roland and his lady."

"It would be far worse than never seeing one another at all."

"Oh no, Dick—not worse, much better than that."

"It would be much worse to me. I should have to look out for an appointment somewhere at the other end of the Empire."

"Dick, how unkind of you to say such a thing!" There were tears very near to falling in Georgia's eyes, but Dick, with an extraordinary access of tact, pretended not to notice them, and looked up at her with a friendly smile.

"Yes, I know I'm a brute. I warn you not to have me, Georgie. I have had a good fright just now, and I'm properly subdued for the moment, but I am bound to break out again. It isn't safe, is it?"

"I don't care whether it is safe or not," and she stooped and kissed him.

"Does that mean that there is to be no more doctoring?"

"Not at all. Did you think you were going to catch me off my guard in a moment of weakness? It means that you agree to my doing what medical work I can, and that I won't let it come between you and me."

"That first part is what one might call a cool assumption, but I told you to make your own conditions, and as I said before, I am prepared to accept them abjectly. Do you know, Georgie, that when I was at Rahmat-Ullah it was hinted to me that I might be made assistant political agent when they establish the agency at Iskandarbagh? How would you like that?"

"Dick, it's too good to be true! It is like a dream. To have you, and my work, and to be able to reach not only Khemistan but my dear Ethiopian women!"

"How do you propose to employ yourself, then?"

"In doctoring the women and children, and teaching where I am allowed."

"And leaving your house to take care of itself?"

"Yes, of course, and my husband too. It would set such a good example to the Ethiopian women, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, well, if I am only to be regarded in the light of an object-lesson——"

"You will accept the position with resignation, and be thankful. Oh, Dick, don't let us tease one another any more! Can't you

understand that I am glad and proud to have the chance of helping you a little in your work? It was my father's work too, you know."

"Yes, I know. You might come a little closer, Georgie. You don't seem to understand yet that I make my doctor pay for the privilege of attending me."

"Come, Mr. Stratford, you mustn't tire Sir Dugald. I am sure he has done quite enough work this morning."

Stratford looked at Lady Haigh rather guiltily, almost as though he felt that he ought to tell her something, but could not make up his mind to do it.

"I didn't want him to go on so long, Lady Haigh, but he insisted on looking through the journal. Of course he wanted to be posted up in everything before we start to-morrow, in view of reaching Rahmat-Ullah so soon. I'm afraid you will find that—that he has been doing a little too much."

Lady Haigh went into the room with a scolding on her lips, but it died away when her eyes fell upon Sir Dugald, sitting at the table with his head leaning on his hand. As she entered, he pushed aside wearily the papers before him, and turned to her.

"It's no use, Elma, I am done for—a worn-out, useless wreck. I always hoped to die in harness, but now I am laid on the shelf. It is all right until I get to business, but I cannot grasp things. My brain refuses to work."

This confirmation of fears which had already occurred to herself and Georgia struck a chill to Lady Haigh's heart, but she dared not hold out any hope of improvement by way of comfort. She came forward silently, and standing at her husband's side, laid her hand rather timidly on his shoulder.

"It's all up, Elma," he said again. "The very *ad valorem* duties in the treaty—over which I spent so much time before I was ill—stump me now. We lose everything—position, occupation, influence, even reputation."

"You have nothing left but your poor old wife," she said, stifling a sob.

"I don't count you," he said, with something of his old manner; "you are part of myself. We have gone through everything together, Elma."

Lady Haigh murmured something about going home to Scotland and ending their days together, but she left the sentence unfinished. How she managed to get out of the room without absolutely breaking down she did not know, but Georgia found her a short time later dissolved in tears.

"He never spoke to me like that before," she sobbed. "We have never been a sentimental couple—not even when we were first married. He couldn't bear that sort of thing, and though I might have liked a little—just a little—more *expression*, don't you know?"

I was not going to worry him. We were good comrades always, and I think I can say that I never stood in his way when he was ordered to do anything. He would come to me in the morning and say, 'Elma, I am ordered to such and such a place,' a thousand miles off, perhaps, and I would say, 'Very well, dear; what time must I be ready? or will it do if we start to-morrow?' He never said anything, but I knew he liked it, and he was as proud as I was that I could shift quarters as quickly as any soldier of them all. And we have always been together, as he says, and now he must give up work at last!"

"But you have your place in Scotland, Lady Haigh, and Sir Dugald will find plenty to do there, and be very happy. It would not surprise me if he recovered entirely when he had no official work to worry him."

"But that very official work has been the main-spring of his life. He will be lost without it! And how will things go on without him? To escape so many dangers and recover from that poisoning just for this! No, Georgie, don't try to show me the bright side of it yet. Let me have my cry out now, and, God helping me, I'll say no more about it, and he sha'n't know. I won't fail him after all just when he needs me most."

"Dick," said Georgia that evening when they met before dinner, "who is the bravest woman you know?"

"You," he replied promptly.

"Don't be absurd; I wasn't fishing for compliments! I should be satisfied if I were half as brave as Lady Haigh. I think that she and Sir Dugald are just worthy of one another."

"I suppose there's a concealed snub somewhere in that remark intended for me, but I can't quite locate it yet. I have a good mind to ask Stratford to find it out for me—I always want to apply to him for an explanation when your reproofs are couched in too learned language—but he isn't down yet."

"Here he comes," said Georgia, as Stratford entered somewhat hurriedly and cast a hasty glance round the room; "but, if you ever venture to ask him to interpret me, Dick, why, beware!"

"I should never think of doing it in cold blood. It might be too much for his brain. What's the matter, Stratford?" he asked, raising his voice. "You're not late."

"The Chief not down yet?" asked Stratford, looking round again and making sure that Sir Dugald and Lady Haigh were the only members of the party who were missing. It was the first time that the two invalids had been allowed to join the rest at dinner, and the servants were obviously unhappy at the delay.

"No," said Fitz, "the poor old chap is so thin after his illness that Lady Haigh is making Chanda Lal pad his dress-coat a bit to keep him from looking quite so like a scarecrow."

"I wish you would have the goodness to confine your jokes to

other people, Anstruther, and not go sharpening your wit on the Chief!" said Stratford irritably. "Look here, all of you, there was something I particularly wanted to say when I got you all together, and this is just the chance. I beg and entreat you all not to allude after to-day—even in private letters or in talking to friends—to the way in which I managed to get the treaty signed."

"Why, Stratford, there was nothing to be ashamed of!" cried Dick. "It was one of the finest things I ever heard of."

"You don't see what I'm driving at. At present the Chief has got it into his head that the sudden change in the King's attitude was entirely due to the discovery by independent means of Fath-ud-Din's treachery and the consequent promotion of Jahan Beg. He thinks that I happened on the spot exactly at the right moment and got the treaty signed without a bit of trouble, and I want him to go on thinking so."

"But do you mean to say you don't want him to know that it was all through you that the old fraud was unmasked, and that you went to the Palace for the sake of rescuing Miss Keeling, and at the risk of your life? What on earth is your reason?"

"I should have thought you would have seen it at once. I want the Chief to get the full credit for this piece of work."

"But this is nonsense!" cried Dick. "Why should the Chief get the credit for what you did? He is the last man in the world to wish to wear borrowed plumes."

"Of course he is, and that's the reason that I want no one beyond our immediate selves to know that they are borrowed. Lady Haigh honestly believes that he did all the work, and that I merely reaped the fruit, so that she won't let out. Sir Dugald has never been properly appreciated at home, and it is hard on him to lose the fame he deserves for the way he has managed this affair, which he will do if it once gets known that it was not he who got the treaty signed after all. He is an old man, and he will do no more work after this. His illness has left marks on him. You have noticed it, Miss Keeling, I am sure?"

"There is some loss of brain power," said Georgia hesitatingly, "which may be only temporary. But I fear his official career is over."

"You see that, then? Let him get his peerage and the credit of having made the treaty. After all, he did by far the greater part of the work."

"Only you came romping in at the finish," said Fitz. "But what about your own prospects, Mr. Stratford?"

"They can look after themselves. I may mention that the Chief let out this morning that he intended to mention us all very honourably in his report, so that we shall none of us lose in the long run."

"It is splendid of you to leave Sir Dugald the credit in this way,

Mr. Stratford," said Georgia; "and we shall all think far more highly of you than if you had claimed the honour for yourself."

"But what about your archives—your official journal?" asked Dick, who was still unconvinced.

"I wrote that entry myself. Hush, here comes the Chief!"

And the conspiracy of silence was an accomplished fact, although Dick continued to argue the matter vainly with both Stratford and Georgia all the evening, as often as he could get either of them alone. They succeeded at last in reducing him to a condition of grumbling acquiescence, and, during the journey of the next few days, all the conspirators did their best to accustom themselves to the new view of what had happened, until they were almost ready to accept it as the true one. Strangely enough, however, they had left out of account an important element which ought to have entered into their calculations, and it was through this oversight that their deep-laid schemes at last failed of success. The blow came suddenly on the last day of the march, when the officers at Fort Rahmat-Ullah, riding out to welcome the returning travellers, had met them on the frontier. The Mission was being escorted back to the Fort in triumph, and Sir Dugald, able now to mount his horse, was talking to the Commandant as they rode side by side.

"Your staff seem to have come out uncommonly well in this business," remarked the commandant. "Of course we expected great things from North, and we were not a bit astonished when he turned up with the treaty, after a three days' solitary ride, but that Foreign Office fellow of yours—Stratford his name is, isn't it?—appears to have developed in a wholly unexpected direction."

"My staff have all behaved extremely well, and I shall have great pleasure in representing the fact in the proper quarter."

"Oh, come, Haigh, it's more than that—or do you include absolute heroism in the bond of your requirements? It is not every civilian that would take his life in his hand in the way your man did, and have the nerve to carry through a palace revolution and secure the object of the Mission all at once. I can tell you that when we heard the story from Hicks, there wasn't one of us but was simply yearning to have had Stratford's chance, and to have made as good a use of it as he did."

"I wish I had scragged Hicks!" muttered Stratford, behind, to Dick, but Sir Dugald's face betrayed no astonishment.

"Then I suppose our friend Hicks is beforehand with us now in the matter of news, as he was a short time ago in reaching Kubbet-ul-Haj?"

"You bet he is—as he would say himself. The story of your Mission is all over the world by this time, and Hicks and the proprietor of the *Crier* are raking in the shekels like so much dust. Upon my word, it is rather rough on you. But for that illness of yours, you would have carried the whole thing through yourself, and

now you have lost the biggest advertisement you were ever within an ace of getting. Stratford is the popular hero from end to end of the Empire, and no one else will have a look-in beside him."

"You would not wish me to rob Mr. Stratford of the honour which is due to him?" inquired Sir Dugald, raising his eyebrows. "If I know him at all, he will owe Hicks just as much thanks for his advertisement as I should in his place, and that is—nothing. He is so touchy on the subject of his visit to the Palace that I have scarcely yet been able to mention it to him myself. Still, it is a little disappointing to find that we have been forestalled in the announcement of our great *coup*. You agree with me, Mr. Stratford?" and Sir Dugald turned partially round in his saddle, and cast a side-glance at the guilty Stratford, who looked extremely unlike a popular hero at the moment. He muttered something unintelligible in reply to his leader's question, and Sir Dugald smiled and changed the subject as he rode on with the commandant.

In the bustle and confusion of arriving at the Fort, Stratford heard no more of his attempted deception until late that evening, when he and Fitz, who had been dining with the officers at mess, walked over to the verandah in front of the Haighs' old quarters to say good-night. Sir Dugald had employed the interval in catechising Lady Haigh and Georgia, as well as in collecting stray pieces of information from Dick and Kustendjian, so that he was now well acquainted with the history of all that had passed on the eventful day when the treaty had been signed.

"Sit down, Stratford, and don't be in such a hurry," he said, as they came up the steps, divining Stratford's evident intention of seeking safety in flight to his own quarters as soon as the requisite farewells had been exchanged. "We may not have the chance of being together again without any strangers present. Do you know that you have been plotting all this time to play me a very shabby trick—to make a fool of me, in fact, in the eyes of everybody?"

"Pray don't think that I agree with your description of our aims, Sir Dugald, when I say that I can only wish they had succeeded."

"And left me at the mercy of our friend Hicks? Don't you see that as soon as he gave his version of your proceedings, I should be suspected either of concealing the facts or of being ignorant of them? I have no particular fancy for either alternative."

"Unfortunately, we had all left Hicks out of our calculations."

"Most fortunately, if you will allow me to correct you, Hicks declines to be ignored in such an unceremonious fashion. I suppose you imply that if he had occurred to your memory you would have tried to square him? You ought to know by this time that there is no one on earth so incorruptible as the newspaper man who has a big sensation in charge. The wealth of India would not move him, if the condition of receiving it was the suppression of his 'copy.' And what a fine story he could have made out of your eager attempts

(instigated, without a doubt, by myself), to bribe him not to publish the true facts of the case! The issue would have been simple ruin for both of us. Not that that is the worst of it. Since when, Mr. Stratford, have you imagined me capable of trading upon another man's reputation?"

"Honestly, Sir Dugald, our only idea was to preserve for you the credit which we know you deserve, but which Hicks and the world are determined to award to the wrong man."

"My dear Stratford, I have no doubt as to the entire excellence of your intentions, although I can't congratulate you on the steps you took to carry them out. I cannot be too thankful that your Quixotic scheme has failed. Leaving out of sight all the other considerations, I have still a little pride left, and I can't stand being indebted, even to my friends, for a reputation which doesn't belong to me. I have had my day, and I am quite ready to walk off, and leave the stage to the younger men."

"Ah, Sir Dugald," said Stratford earnestly, "none of the younger men can hope to do what you have done."

"Stuff!" said Sir Dugald, but he could not help allowing a gleam of pleasure to be seen. "You have all done your duty under very trying circumstances, and I am proud of you, gentlemen."

"And we of you, Sir Dugald," said Dick, finding his tongue suddenly.

"You are bringing home peace with honour, as you said once at Kubbet-ul-Haj," said Stratford.

"The Chief gets the peace, and Stratford the honour," observed Fitz, *sotto voce*, to Georgia. "Do you call that a fair division or not, Miss Keeling?"

EPILOGUE.

(BEING part of a letter addressed by Mr. Fitzgerald Anstruther, about a year later than the return of the English Mission from Kubbet-ul-Haj, to Mrs. North, British Residency, Iskandarbagh.)

" I have just come back from my visit to Sir Dugald and Lady Haigh at Inverconglisch. The Chief is all right again, and looks quite bucolic in knickerbockers and a deerstalker—a regular 'tyrant of his little fields,' indeed. I had promised myself the pleasure of seeing him in a kilt, but he says that his tenants are a serious-minded people, unaccustomed to laughter, and he is afraid the sight of him so arrayed might do them severe physical injury. He is a great power in the neighbourhood, and the people bring their disputes to him to settle instead of going to law, so that he is quite busy and happy, though he has not got his peerage. Lady Haigh, who directs the affairs (particularly the love affairs) of the locality generally, told

me something about Stratford that will amuse you and North. He is destined, so they say, to get a high appointment before long, and meanwhile he has devoted his leave to falling in love with a girl just out of the schoolroom, who is desperately frightened by his attentions, and won't have a word to say to him. Lady Haigh says she is rather like a lady whom Stratford knew long ago, and who died. She is a hero-worshipper, and has adored him from a distance since Hicks first made him known to the British public, but she doesn't want him to come any closer. However, if old Stratford makes up his mind to stick to a thing, I fancy he is pretty sure to get it. By-the-bye, I met Hicks the other day. He was just off to Thracia again, drawn by the rumour of these new disturbances. He quite considers himself as one of us, and says that when we of the old Kubbet-ul-Haj gang meet next to celebrate the signing of the treaty, he will be there, if he has to come from the other side of the world in order to be present ”

THE END.

VICTORS.

WHO wert Thou, Lord, who wouldst not tell Thy name
To Jacob, wrestling with Thee all alone,
And wast in haste at daybreak to be gone?
O Thou strong Wrestler, wast Thou then the same
As He who called to Moses from the flame
Of that strange bush which unconsumed burned on
In sacred Horeb? Ere the town was won,
Wast Thou that Captain who to Joshua came,
Watching by Jericho's beleaguered wall?
Who wast Thou, Lord, whom only watching eyes
Might see, whom bold men, striving hard, withal,
And not prevailing, rose up from their fall
Invincible? Lord, meet us in such wise!
So vanquish us that we shall vanquish all!

M. A. M. MARKS.

THE TESTIMONY OF GENIUS.

"All the help I can offer, in my poor degree, is the assurance that I see ever more reason to hold by the same hope—and that by no means in ignorance of what has been advanced to the contrary ; and for your sake I would wish it to be true that I had so much of 'genius' as to permit the testimony of an especially privileged insight to come in aid of the ordinary argument. For I know I myself have been aware of the communication of something more subtle than a ratiocinative process, when the convictions of 'genius' have thrilled my soul to its depths."—*Robert Browning*.

SO Browning wrote (in 1876) to an invalid lady who had thanked him in a letter for the help his poems had afforded her, through the unfaltering expression they contain of his belief in a more perfect life beyond the grave. Quoting Napoleon's tribute, and then that of Charles Lamb (probably the only time those names have ever been coupled together), to the Founder of our Faith, he goes on, "Or, not to multiply instances, as when Dante wrote what I will transcribe from my wife's testament, wherein I recorded it fourteen years ago :—

"Thus I believe, thus I affirm, thus I am certain it is, that from this life I shall pass to another better, there, where that lady lives, of whom my soul was enamoured."

Rudolph Lehmann, in 'An Artist's Reminiscences,' reports Browning as saying, toward the end of his life, "I have doubted and denied it [the future life] and I fear have even printed my doubts. But now I am as deeply convinced that there is something after death. If you ask me what, I no more know it than my dog knows who and what I am. He knows I am there, and that is enough for him."

In the same spirit Keats wrote to his brother and sister, George and Georgiana Keats : "I will not enter into any parsonic comments on death, yet the common observations of the commonest people on death are as true as their proverbs. I have scarce a doubt of immortality of some kind or other."

With an expression of faith equal to Dante's Petrarch, in whose poems the image of Laura in heaven shines with such lustre, wrote on her death in sober prose upon the margin of a Latin manuscript : "Her body, so beautiful, so pure, was deposited on the day of her death, after vespers, in the church of the Cordeliers. Her soul, as Seneca has said of Africanus, I am confident, returned to heaven, from whence it came."

It was of such moments as these under the impulse of which the two Italian poets uttered their expressions of belief, when the foundations of one's earth are shaken and the heavens rent, that Richter wrote, as translated by Carlyle : "A man may for twenty years

believe the immortality of the soul; in the one and twentieth, in some great moment, he for the first time discovers with amazement the rich meaning of this belief, the warmth of this naphtha-well."

At even such a moment it was, on the occasion of his wife's funeral, that Sir Walter Scott wrote in his diary (May 1826): "But it is not my Charlotte; it is not the bride of my youth, the mother of my children that will be laid among the ruins of Dryburgh, which we have so often visited in gaiety and pastime. No! no! She is sentient and conscious of my emotions somewhere, somehow: *where* we cannot tell; *how* we cannot tell; yet would I not at this moment renounce the mysterious yet certain hope that I shall see her in a better world for all that this world can give me." And it was not, as we all know, that the Laird of Abbotsford was indifferent to what this world can give.

It is with a yearning akin to Lamb's for the old familiar faces (Lamb who, Coleridge said, would have been a Christian had he never heard of Christ), that Cicero expresses his longing after his departed friends, his "dear Cato" in particular. And it is curious that it should be the heathen writer who looks forward with the more confident hope to seeing them again, a hope evidently sincere in the utterance of it, both in the following passage and others, however his faith may have fallen short at times:

"O glorious day," he exclaims, "when I shall depart to that divine company and assemblage of spirits, and quit this troubled and polluted scene. For I shall go not only to those great men of whom I have spoken before, but also to my dear Cato . . . whose body was burned by me, whereas, on the contrary, it was fitting that mine should be burned by him. But his soul not deserting me, but oft looking back, no doubt departed to those regions whither it saw that I myself was destined to come."

"My own dim life should teach me this,
That life shall live for evermore,"

says Tennyson. And even Shelley who, for all his idealism, had less hold on the belief in a hereafter than many who drew their

"Pearls of faith from out the sea
Before men fished in Galilee,"

yet seemed inclined to think with those, whether heathen or Christian, whose spiritual vision was surer than his own. "I am content," he wrote to Trelawny, "to see no farther into futurity than Plato and Bacon. My mind is tranquil; I have no fears and some hopes. In our present gross material state our faculties are clouded. When death removes our clay coverings the mystery will be solved."

John Addington Symonds, in his 'Life of Shelley,' quotes an incident related by Trelawny to show, as he remarks, how constantly the thought of death as the revealer was present to Shelley's mind,

Shelley and Trelawny were bathing in the Arno, when Shelley, who could not swim, plunged into deep water and lay, according to Trelawny, "stretched out at the bottom like a conger eel, not making the least effort or struggle to save himself." Trelawny having performed that office for him, the poet, as soon as he had taken breath, said : "I always find the bottom of the well, and they say Truth lies there. In another minute I should have found it, and you would have found an empty shell. Death is the veil, which those who live call life ; they sleep and it is lifted." *

Byron also, more material than Shelley, though perhaps more susceptible to religious impressions, dwelling in fancy on the peace "that waits us on the shores of Acheron" where—

"No forced banquet claims the sated guest,
But silence spreads the couch of ever-welcome rest,"

pauses to take comfort, as Shelley did, from the thought, and to support his own wavering faith against it, that the best men have ever taught of something more than peace and rest beyond the grave :—

"Yet if, as holiest men have deem'd, there be
A land of souls beyond that sable shore,
To shame the doctrine of the Sadducee
And sophists, madly vain of dubious lore ;
How sweet it were in concert to adore
With those who made our mortal labours light !
To hear each voice we fear'd to hear no more!
Behold each mighty shade reveal'd to sight,
The Bactrian, Samian sage, and all who taught the right." †

Precisely the mood of lofty hope that Socrates himself indulged in face of death, when he said, as reported by Plato : "If death is the journey to another place, and there, as men say, all the dead are, what good, O my friends and judges, can be greater than this? what would not a man give if he might converse with Orpheus, and Musæus, and Hesiod, and Homer? Nay, if this be true, let me die again and again!"

Byron, indeed, resented the imputation of unbelief. He thus repels it :

"Some kinder casuists are pleased to say
In nameless print that I have no devotion ;
But set those persons down with me to pray,
And you shall see who has the properest notion
Of getting into heaven the shortest way ;
My altars are the mountains and the ocean,
Earth, air, stars—all that springs from the great Whole,
Who hath produced, and will receive the soul." ‡

* This idea of death as a veil is beautifully amplified by the fourteenth-century Persian poet, Hafiz, as translated by Mr. Justin McCarthy :—

"Grieve not because thou understandest not life's mystery. Behind the veil is concealed many a delight."

† 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,' Canto II.

‡ 'Don Juan,' Canto III.

The above lines are from a passage in which the purer element in Byron's nature almost gets the better of his more flippant vein. In a note to the stanza succeeding it, in Murray's edition of the poet's works, Count Gamba's account of his ride with Lord Byron through the pine-woods of Ravenna is quoted :

"We were riding on horseback in an extensive solitary wood of pines. The scene invited to religious meditation. It was a fine day in spring. 'How,' he said, 'raising our eyes to heaven, or directing them to the earth, can we doubt of the existence of God? Or how, turning them to what is within us, can we doubt that there is something more noble and durable than the clay of which we are formed?'"

Goethe's testimony is of a very positive character. "It is to a thinking being," he says, "quite impossible to think himself non-existent, ceasing to think and live. So far does every one carry in himself the proof of immortality, and quite spontaneously."

George Meredith in the same spirit declares, in "*Diana of the Cross-ways*," that, "it is impossible to think at all, and not think hopefully."

"I feel in myself the future life," said Victor Hugo, with sublime assurance.

"I am so certain of the soul's being immortal that I seem to feel it within me, as it were, by intuition," declared Pope, a short time before his death, as reported in Spence's "*Anecdotes*." Pope, who in his version of Homer's *Iliad* had written :

" 'Tis true, 'tis certain, man, though dead, retains
Part of himself, th' immortal mind remains."

Jean Jacques Rousseau is to the full as emphatic : "Not all the subtleties of metaphysics can make me doubt for a moment the immortality of the soul, and of a beneficent Providence. I feel it, I believe it, I desire it, I hope it, and will defend it to my last breath."

While Montesquieu, through the very medium of metaphysics, arrives at the same conclusion : "I delight," he says in his "*Pensées Diverses*," "in believing myself as immortal as God Himself. Independently of revealed ideas, metaphysical ideas give me a vigorous hope of my eternal well-being, which I would never renounce."

The same intuitive assurance of immortality is expressed in that now well-known poem of Emily Brontë, of which Charlotte says : "The following are the last lines my sister Emily ever wrote." A marvellous poem to have been written by a dying girl in her father's parsonage, which she had scarcely ever quitted, on the Yorkshire moors, but in which disturbing whispers from the outer world had, no doubt, reached her :

" No coward soul is mine,
No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere :
I see Heaven's glories shine,
And faith shines equal, arming me from fear.

O God within my breast,
Almighty, ever-present Deity !
Life—that in me has rest,
As I—undying Life—have power in Thee !

Vain are the thousand creeds
That move men's hearts : unutterably vain ;
Worthless as withered weeds,
Or idlest froth amid the boundless main,

To waken doubt in one
Holding so fast by Thine infinity ;
So surely anchored on
The steadfast rock of immortality.

With wide-embracing love
Thy spirit animates eternal years,
Pervades and broods above,
Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates, and rears.

Though earth and man were gone,
And suns and universes ceased to be,
And Thou wert left alone,
Every existence would exist in Thee.

There is not room for Death,
Nor atom that his might could render void :
Thou—Thou art Being and Breath,
And what Thou art may never be destroyed."

Addison summarises this argument of immortality from man's innate perception of it in his famous "Soliloquy of Cato," which concludes with the triumphant assurance :

"The stars shall fade away, the sun herself
Grow dim with age, and nature sink in years ;
But thou shalt flourish in immortal youth,
Unhurt amid the war of elements,
The wreck of matter, and the crash of worlds." *

An echo of which may be found in Walt Whitman's lines :

"You are henceforth secure, whatever comes or goes—
Yourself, yourself, yourself, for ever and ever."

Whitman is too sure of his own identity to be afraid of ever losing it. He will not believe that seventy years, "nor that seventy millions of years" is the span of human life. His are as different from the shallow, unreal hopes with which some are able to content themselves as the void Nirvana is from Paradise. How inspiriting are his hearty assurances of immortality ! To the misgivings that occasionally assail him, again and again he returns victorious answer :

"Did you think life was so well provided for, and Death, the purport of all life, is not well provided for ?"

Amid what to others might seem the most appalling, most annihila-

* 'Cato,' Act V., Scene I.

ting discoveries in science, he moves familiarly as in his old paternal homestead, and finds in them the wholesomest nutriment for his dreams of universal joy and immortality.

And Whitman's belief was no vague theory reserved for imaginative moods. He subjected it to the most crucial tests. In the midst of the conflicting emotions roused in him by the news of the death of Carlyle, whose personality had powerfully impressed him, "And now that he has gone hence," he asks, "can it be that Thomas Carlyle, soon to chemically dissolve in ashes and by winds, remains an identity still? In ways, perhaps, eluding all the statements, lore, and speculations of ten thousand years—eluding all possible statements to mortal sense—does he yet exist, a definite, vital being, a spirit, an individual? . . . I have no doubt of it."

There is something that appeals to the imagination in this contemplation of one old man's death by another already in the twilight of his day. Whitman died about ten years later, chanting to the last, in those barbaric strains of his, his songs of welcome to death, "lovely and soothing death," the solver and reconciler of all.

At the poet's own graveside in Camden, New Jersey, his friends abundantly testified to his "positive belief in immortality," which, with him, said one, "was not a hope or a beautiful dream. He believed that we all live in an eternal universe, and that man is as indestructible as his Creator."

Of Carlyle himself the testimony is not so clear, though at least he was always on the side of hope. Writing on Goethe he exclaims:

"What then is man? He endures but for an hour, and is crushed before the moth. Yet in the being and in the working of a faithful man is there already (as all faith, from the beginning, gives assurance) a something that pertains not to this wild death-element of Time; that triumphs over Time, and *is*, and will be, when Time shall be no more."

And in a letter to John Sterling he quotes Goethe's lines:

"The mason's ways are
A type of existence,
And his persistence
Is as the days are
Of men in this world.

The future hides in it
Gladness and sorrow;
We press still thorough,
Naught that abides in it
Daunting us, onward.

And solemn before us
Veiled the dark Portal,
Goal of all mortal;
Stars silent rest o'er us,
Graves under us silent.

While earnest thou gazest,
Comes boding of terror,
Comes phantasm and error,
Perplexes the bravest
With doubt and misgiving.

But heard are the voices,
Heard are the sage's,
The world's, and the age's.
Choose well: your choice is
Brief and yet endless.

Here eyes do regard you
In eternity's stillness,
Here is all fulness,
Ye brave, to reward you.
Work and despair not."

"Is not that a piece of psalmody?" concludes Carlyle. "It seems to me like a piece of marching music to the great brave Teutonic kindred as they march through the waste of Time—that section of eternity they were appointed for. *Oben die Sterne und unten die Gräber*, etc. Let us all sing it and march on cheerful of heart. 'We bid you to hope.* So say the voices, do they not?'

The poem was quoted by Carlyle in the original, Froude substituting for it Carlyle's own translation. It was, writes Froude, "on Carlyle's lips to the last days of his life. When very near the end he quoted the last lines of it to me when speaking of what might lie beyond. 'We bid you to hope.'

There was another poem, received by Carlyle in a note from Lockhart, which, likewise, his biographer tells us, was often on his lips in those last lonely days, and which has a more personal note of hope than Goethe's:

"It is an old belief
That on some solemn shore,
Beyond the sphere of grief,
Dear friends shall meet once more:

Beyond the sphere of time,
And sin, and fate's control,
Serene in changeless prime
Of body and of soul.

That creed I fain would keep,
This hope I'll not forego;
Eternal be the sleep
If not to waken so."

Many years before, Carlyle had written to his wife, on the death of her aunt, "Surely, surely, there is a life beyond death, and that gloomy portal leads to a purer and an abiding mansion?" And later, on the far more grievous loss of her mother: "Patience, my darling! She has gone whither we are swiftly following her.

* "Wir heissen euch hoffen."

Perhaps essentially she is still near us. Near and far do not belong to that eternal world which is not of space and time. God rules that too ; we know nothing more."

Tennyson splendidly carried on the tradition of "the voices." Had we only "In Memoriam," it would be enough to prove his faith in the survival of the individual. But the thought of immortality was the dominant note of his life as of his poetry. To him "annihilation was impossible and inconceivable."* Mr. Wilfred Ward, in the 'New Review' (July 1896) quotes him as follows :

"Lushington used to say to me that if there were no other world, this world would be all the more valuable. I, on the contrary, feel that it is only the light shed on our earth from another world which gives it any value."

To Lord Houghton, on the death of Lady Houghton, in a letter given in Sir Wemyss Reid's 'Life of Lord Houghton,' he writes, "I may say that I think I can see, as far as one can see in this twilight, that the nobler nature does not pass from its individuality when it passes out of this one life."

And, in 'The Nineteenth Century' (January 1893) Mr. Knowles gives the following testimony : "He [Tennyson] formulated once and quite deliberately his own religious creed in these words—'There's a something that watches over us; and our individuality endures : that's my faith, and that's all my faith.' " A faith that, in his poems, rises to something higher, and of a far more personal intensity.

The Queen bears testimony to her laureate's faith in a touching passage in her private journal (1883) :

"After luncheon saw the great poet Tennyson in dearest Albert's room for nearly an hour; and most interesting it was. He is grown very old, his eyesight much impaired. But he was very kind. Asked him to sit down. He talked of many friends he had lost, and what it would be if he did not feel and know that there was another world where there would be no partings; and then he spoke with horror of the unbelievers and philosophers who would make you believe there was no other world, no immortality, who tried to explain all away in a miserable manner. We agreed that, were such a thing possible, God, who is Love, would be far more cruel than any human being."

It is a striking scene, that of the two, meeting on their lonely heights of worldly grandeur and of genius, the other sadder loneliness of age about them also, and exchanging their beliefs in the unseen world beyond, where neither genius nor worldly grandeur are of any account, except in so far as they have been used for good.

"Coeval with human nature, twin-born with man himself," writes De Quincey, in a letter to his daughter, Margaret, "must have been

* Tennyson, as reported by Professor Knight : 'Blackwood's Magazine, August, 1897.

the belief in man's immortality. Neither in his own person, nor through his disciples, did Plato ever dream of advancing so preposterous a pretension as that of having first suggested a privilege of immortality for the human soul. What Plato claimed, was, that for this old, old doctrine—old probably as the stars—he first had alleged particular arguments. . . .

"Wordsworth, not less than Plato, gave his sanction to the doctrine that the human soul revealed signs and promises of an immortal destiny."

Emerson says the same, that "there never was a time when the doctrine of a future life was not held." And, on his own account: "I am a better believer, and all serious souls are better believers, in the immortality than we can give grounds for. The real evidence is too subtle, or is higher than we can write down in propositions, and therefore," he adds, "Wordsworth's 'Ode' is the best modern essay on the subject."

That ode, "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of early Childhood," is excluded here on account of its length. But over all Wordsworth's writings, as over the Child of his poem, the thought of immortality

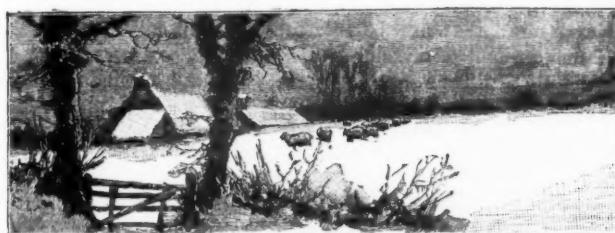
"Broods like the day, a master o'er a slave,
A Presence which is not to be put by."

And the same might be said of Coleridge.

"There is, I know not how," said Cicero, "in the minds of men, a certain presage, as it were, of a future existence, and this takes the deepest root and is most discoverable in the greatest geniuses and most exalted souls."

The saying has more force now than when Cicero uttered it nearly two thousand years ago.

P. W. ROOSE.



THE STOP-GAP.

I.

IT was a well-admitted fact among Willy Ranger's friends that he was not a first-class shot. Probably there was no point upon which they all more unanimously agreed; and as Willy entirely shared their opinion, the subject did not seem to demand much discussion. In point of fact, the question would never have been raised at all, if it had not been for this unexpected invitation to Merlyn Towers. Willy read it over at least half a dozen times before he completely grasped its significance. To a mind less bewildered by astonishment the short note presented no difficulties. It was merely an invitation from Sir Stephen Taine to come on a week's visit, that was to include two days' covert shooting. Of course he was asked as a stop-gap. That was pretty evident in view of his being requested to arrive on the following day without fail. Now it was notorious that Sir Stephen not only existed himself, but kept up Merlyn Towers, merely on account of the shooting; and probably his parties for the season had been carefully made up and revised months ago. Willy was not a morsel offended at being invited as a stop-gap. They were the only terms, as he well knew, upon which he should ever be asked to participate in first-class shooting. It was only a modest doubt as to his power of coming up even to the moderate standard required of a stop-gap that made him hesitate before writing to accept.

"What should you do in my place?" he inquired, addressing his best friend, who at that moment happened to stroll into the smoking-room.

"Go, of course!" said Mr. Brown promptly. "Though what they want you for, I can't—"

"Never mind that now!" interrupted Willy. "The question is, shall I make a fool of myself?"

"Well, that will be nothing new, anyhow," replied Mr. Brown pleasantly.

Either this argument proved satisfactory, or Willy's curiosity finally overcame his prudence; at any rate the following afternoon found him in the train travelling rapidly towards Merlyn Towers. His natural diffidence would have been much increased if he could have been present at an interview which was just then going on between his host and hostess.

Sir Stephen was pacing up and down the hall, greatly to the disturbance of Lady Taine, who would have liked quietly to enjoy her easy-chair and novel while waiting for tea. She was very fond of that

pleasant half-hour's rest, in the great oak-panelled hall, which she had rendered so completely comfortable with a liberal furnishing of arm-chairs and Oriental rugs. It was true that Sir Stephen was not actively interrupting her, as he had not yet spoken ; but so disturbing was the regular tramp of his heavy boots on the polished floor, that it was a positive relief when he stumbled noisily over a footstool and stopped.

"Dear me ! I hope you didn't hurt yourself," murmured Lady Taine softly, but without betraying the slightest uneasiness on account of her husband's sufferings. She was very fond of surreptitiously introducing new bits of furniture into the rooms, which he invariably fell over on the first opportunity, these daily accidents not being, she reflected, due to her love of novelty, but to his tiresome habit of prowling up and down like a forlorn Polar bear when anything was on his mind. "What is it?" she continued sympathetically. "I can see something has upset you."

"I believe I've made a mistake asking young Ranger as the extra gun," replied Sir Stephen, magnanimously ignoring the footstool episode. "I hear he's no good—no good at all. I was asking a man who knows him—"

"Well, and could he tell you whether that Yorkshire property is entailed upon Willy Ranger or not?" interposed Lady Taine. "I have heard so, and of course he is the eldest nephew. But people talk so much, and one never knows what to believe."

"There seems no mistake this time," continued Sir Stephen gloomily. "They all say the same thing—he's no good at all!"

"Oh, well, we know he must have about two thousand a year from his father. That's not so bad considering neither of the girls has anything to speak of."

"The girls indeed !" interrupted Sir Stephen angrily. "Why you go stuffing the house up with a lot of girls, I can't imagine."

"My dear, the men won't come without them."

"Won't come indeed ! Won't come to my shooting !" he growled. "That just shows how much you know about it. And then when you have filled the house with girls, the next thing is you persuade me to ask a young duffer to amuse them. And so it goes on, and that's what you call arranging a shooting party."

Lady Taine remained calm and smiling in spite of this insulting accusation. If she had ever attempted to argue with her husband she would not have remained so well preserved as was actually the case after thirty years of married life. It is true Sir Stephen would have infinitely preferred arguments to smiles, but she was not in the habit of consulting his opinion upon mere matters of taste. In a similar way she never interfered in his department ; and it was quite an innovation her having dared to suggest Willy Ranger as a stop-gap, when one of the guns fell ill at the last moment. Her motive in so doing was, it has already been hinted, purely benevolent ; namely to

promote the interests of some young girls who were temporarily under her care.

Lady Taine, having no children of her own, got a good deal of quiet pleasure out of amateur match-making. They are not the mothers as a rule who enjoy this game most thoroughly. With them there is too much at stake to permit of a just appreciation of the humours of the situation. They are nervous and apprehensive: taking the affair so gravely to heart as often to defeat their own aims. But to Lady Taine it was merely a pleasant pastime; the results of which were just sufficiently serious to render it interesting. It was with some pride she reflected that in spite of Sir Stephen several very successful engagements had taken place under her roof. At this present moment she had two girls staying in the house, either of whom it would be a pleasure to help settle in life. And by a special stroke of good fortune she had secured a young man who might suit either of them. He would not be a despicable match for her own niece, Elfrida Gramont; and if that young lady, being a beauty and somewhat haughty, disdained him, he looked sufficiently guileless to fall a victim to little Carrie Hudson.

Mr. Ranger was naturally utterly unaware of these arrangements for his ultimate disposal, as he stumbled out of the chill discomfort of a November twilight into the well-warmed cheerful hall. Lady Taine rose to greet him with her comfortable smile of welcome; explaining that Sir Stephen was busy in his own room, and might not be expected to appear for some time.

Willy sat down near the great sparkling wood fire, with a cup of tea, feeling that he could endure his host's absence with considerable equanimity. He knew Sir Stephen very slightly, and was rather in awe of that gentleman's concentrated energy of purpose. It was much easier to get on with Lady Taine, who instinctively asked questions that he was able to answer, and lighted upon the few topics with which he was well acquainted. Indeed the interest she displayed in the breeding of Irish terriers set her apart at once as the most discerning hostess it had ever been his good fortune to meet. He was quite sorry when the opening of a door disturbed their interview.

"Mr. Ranger—Miss Hudson," observed Lady Taine, lightly indicating the young girl who entered. "Have some more tea, Carrie? It's quite fresh, better in fact than what we had before. I couldn't enjoy that a bit with poor Sir Stephen prowling about the room. The presence of a man who doesn't take tea is so terribly destructive to comfort; they constitute themselves into a sort of standing reproach. Why society permits it at all I can't imagine. Now, if directly I had swallowed my bit of dry toast at breakfast I got up and paraded the room, glaring at the men who are wading through enormous hams and dishes of mutton chops, what would be thought of me? I suppose I should be languishing in a lunatic asylum before long, shouldn't I?"

"Yes, of course!" assented Willy heartily.

Lady Taine looked a little puzzled, and then burst out laughing. "I do like Mr. Ranger," she said. "Don't you, Carrie? He's so genuine!"

"Yes—no! That's to say I hardly understand," stammered the girl, with so much visible embarrassment as to attract her hostess's attention.

"Dear me! How shy these young people are!" thought that kindly lady. "I suppose they won't speak to each other as long as I am here. If that little idiot waits till Elfrida appears she will have no chance; but I will be better to her than she deserves. I am just going to see what Sir Stephen is about," she said aloud. "If he is not very busy, I dare say he will come when he knows——"

"Oh, don't disturb him on my account!" interrupted Willy eagerly. But Lady Taine swept out of the room without heeding his remonstrance.

No sooner had the door closed behind her than the scene abruptly changed. The girl, who a moment before had been sitting so stiff and still, now started to her feet, and with a crimson face began pouring out a torrent of words. "How dare you come here?" she cried. "After what happened it's very rude and insulting, and—and unkind."

"But what could I do?" said Willy helplessly. "They asked me here, you see, and I couldn't guess that you even knew them."

"Knew them indeed! Why, Lady Taine was at school with my mother!"

"Now I couldn't be expected to know that, could I?"

"You might have guessed, or found out something, if you had tried," said Miss Hudson angrily. "Anybody with good taste or nice feelings would have avoided such a situation somehow."

Willy had very nice feelings, and they were a good deal hurt by this accusation. Before replying to it, however, he had to deposit his tea-cup on a table and struggle out of the depths of an arm-chair. Leaning with his back against the mantelpiece he felt less unprotected, and more capable of collecting the arguments which were swimming in his brain. In an encounter of this nature the aggressor has naturally the advantage, as it is almost impossible to prove that one has through life acted strictly up to an angry girl's vague standard of gentlemanly conduct.

"After all, it's just as unpleasant for me," he remarked, thoughtfully reviewing the situation in all its bearings.

The facts of the case were simple in the extreme. Some two years before, Mr. Ranger, after a week's acquaintance in a friend's house, had fallen desperately in love with Carrie Hudson, and had implored her ardently but ineffectually to marry him. She being fresh from the schoolroom, and on the look-out for a hero, had no taste for very ordinary young men, and considered this particular specimen

decidedly inferior even to her own brothers in interest. Poor Willy's cheerful good looks and excellent disposition had availed nothing. He had been rejected with scorn, and they had both parted with a hearty unspoken wish that they might never meet again. Accident had now united them in Lady Taine's hall, greatly to their mutual embarrassment.

"If you want me to go away I suppose I must try," said Willy tentatively. "Though I don't quite see how it's to be managed."

"Can't you be taken ill?" she observed.

"Not likely! Why, nobody would believe it. I never have anything."

"Some people have sudden illness. Fits, for instance," she suggested.

"I don't."

"No? How very inconvenient! What can we do?"

"I can't think of anything," replied Willy, staring blankly at Miss Hudson, and wondering why on earth he had been so much in love with her two years ago.

"Perhaps you had better stay after all," said the girl. "If you went away suddenly it would make a fuss, as Sir Stephen wants an extra gun. Only if you stay"—and she grew very red—"you mustn't talk to me or anything!"

"Of course not," assented Willy. "I won't speak a word to you!"

"Oh, I don't think that would quite do!" Carrie smiled in spite of herself. "It would be rather conspicuous, wouldn't it? But I mean you must only talk about the weather and that sort of thing."

"I understand perfectly," replied Mr. Ranger, mentally rehearsing a conversation limited to the variations of the thermometer and barometer.

"Then we will go on as if nothing had ever happened?"

"Certainly," said Willy, who was beginning to wish that this supposition were really the case. Miss Hudson was a nice-looking little person, but he could see nothing in her now to justify his former excessive ardour. At the same time he felt that he should never be completely at his ease in her presence; and this idea filled him with a vague feeling of irritation.

However, these considerations, which appeared so absorbing in the solitude of his room whilst dressing for dinner, all passed from his mind directly he joined the party assembled downstairs. The drawing-room at Merlyn Towers was beautifully decorated in pale blue and silver, and was generally regarded as the show-room of the house. But Lady Taine had long since discovered that her guests were never completely at their ease on blue-satin chairs, so that it was only used on occasions like the present when there was a large party in the house.

As Willy entered the long glittering room his eyes immediately fell on a tall girl, who stood out conspicuously among her more ordinary

surroundings. Whether by reason of her unusual height and extreme fairness, or in consequence of some innate superiority, she was a noticeable figure in any company. Other people, apparently by mutual consent, had an accommodating way of grouping themselves into a sort of background to her beauty. Willy looked, admired, and passed on into a corner. For his part he was quite content to associate with the ordinary herd—the matronly wives of Sir Stephen's middle-aged friends, or the obscure country neighbours who were asked in to make up the party. It was with a pang of horrified astonishment that he presently found himself discovered by Lady Taine, and smilingly introduced to the radiant vision.

"You will take my niece, Miss Gramont, in to dinner."

Willy nearly groaned aloud as his hostess's soft voice fell on his ears. He offered his arm in the most angular fashion imaginable, and stalked off with uncompromising rigidity towards the dining-room. Not a word did he speak, although as a rule his habit was to be confiding almost to garrulity. But now he could not think of any remark sufficiently important to be made to such a glorious creature, whose previous experiences he instinctively felt must have differed widely from his own. Up to this evening Willy had proudly affected a kind of patriotic provincialism, severely condemning such of his neighbours as considered it indispensable to spend a portion of the year in London, and loudly asserting on all possible occasions that country life was all sufficient for any sensible man. In the presence of Miss Gramont he still retained this opinion more obstinately than ever, feeling certain at the same time that she despised him, and equally certain that she was in the wrong. This was not a mental condition in which it was easy to originate an appropriate remark, and the moments flew by while Willy reflected that the only subject that ever appeared to interest smart girls was enumerating the names of the people they had met in London last season. He had never made a study of feigning to be interested in uncongenial topics, and even with the best will imaginable could not have kept up a conversation in this strain for five minutes. Just as he was giving way to positive despair his companion came to the rescue.

"I have seen you before, Mr. Ranger," she began, with the suspicion of a smile in her large grey eyes. "I was at the cricket-match at Blank last summer when you made so many runs for your county."

"Eighty-four, not out," replied Willy promptly. There was no longer any hesitation or nervousness in his manner. The conversation had unexpectedly slid down to his own level.

The next sensation of which he was aware was one of rebellious annoyance when Sir Stephen marched all the men off to the smoking-room at a preposterously early hour. It was an unwritten law of the house that nothing should be done at a shooting-party to interfere with the nerves and general fitness of the guns.

"None of your late hours for me," Sir Stephen used to say—"sitting up half the night playing cards and drinking, and then coming down late to breakfast with shaky hands and no appetite. My pheasants shall be properly killed or not at all."

The conversation in the smoking-room was not of such an entralling nature as to keep Willy very long from his bed. Half a dozen grim old sportsmen, smoking their pipes in comparative silence, were a poor exchange for Miss Gramont's undivided attention.

"At all events, Carrie ought to be pleased," he reflected, as he sauntered up to his room. "I believe I have behaved with what she is pleased to call good taste this evening. I certainly haven't spoken to her, and I don't think I have even looked in her direction."

II.

THERE was an impressive solemnity about breakfast at Merlyn Towers on the morning of a big shoot. Although Sir Stephen was occasionally compelled, as a concession to public opinion, to fill up some of his spare rooms with persons in no way connected with his favourite sport, he never allowed these superfluous individuals to interfere with the important arrangements of the day. Thus, although there were a certain number of ladies down to breakfast at nine o'clock, all conversation was sternly discouraged by the host, whose perpetual habit of consulting his watch and remarking on the advantages of an early start left no doubt as to his wishes.

Willy personally felt but little inclination to talk. The responsibility of his position was weighing heavily upon him.

"Ever been here before?" inquired an old gentleman sitting next to him. "No? Ah! of course you were asked when poor Foster was taken with the influenza. A good shot, very. You'll have all your work cut out to prevent his being missed."

"You are shooting yourself?" inquired Willy gruffly. In his present anxious condition these remarks jarred upon his nerves.

"Shoot indeed!" laughed the old gentleman. "No—not here, at least. Value my comfort too much," he added, dropping his voice and glancing towards Sir Stephen. "No, no! At my time of life it's not good enough to make a business of pleasure. I shall come out to lunch with the ladies at the keeper's cottage, and help to count over the bag. Leave the killing to you young fellows, you know."

Willy internally wondered how many head of game he was to be held responsible for that day. He wished he had never accepted the invitation, all the more so because Miss Gramont had not come down to breakfast; while Carrie was eating hers in sulky silence opposite, evidently still resenting his mere presence, judging by the haste with which she averted her eyes whenever he looked up. It was quite a

relief when breakfast ended and the period of suspense was over. No actual misery could be equal to the anticipations suggested by that old gentleman's hints.

A few hours later, a small party, principally composed of ladies, was crossing the park in the direction of the keeper's cottage.

"This is the shortest way," said Elfrida, who was in temporary charge of the party, for Lady Taine always professed herself unable to see the joke of picnicking in a cottage when it was possible to have a comfortable meal at home. "We must walk fast," continued the girl, "it won't do to keep my uncle waiting. He allows a bare half-hour for lunch, cigarettes included. If we make him cross he won't let us walk with the guns afterwards."

They all quickened their steps at this painful suggestion, and one pretty young married woman remarked that she did hope they should be allowed to see something killed. Sir Stephen could never be so cruel as to send them home, she was sure.

"I wouldn't rely too much on that," observed Elfrida briskly. "A man who is capable of having breakfast at nine o'clock, is capable of anything!"

At that moment the keeper's cottage came in sight; an old ivy-grown building surrounded by a large yard, in which half a dozen dogs were straining at their chains and yelping. In front of the cottage the keepers were busily engaged in laying out a long line of game, which Sir Stephen, note-book in hand, was counting over, and comparing with the numbers of former years. Willy's attention began to wander when he caught sight of the party approaching down the side of the park. He was in excellent spirits, having shot his best all the morning; not up to Merlyn Towers form exactly, but still very well for him. And he had killed a woodcock, the only woodcock, as he presently explained to Miss Gramont with justifiable pride. She was quite properly thrilled by this achievement; much more so than Carrie, who perversely observed that, after all, it must be very easy to kill a woodcock, it looked so big. The element of truth in this assertion made it all the more irritating. Willy could not help reflecting that it was a stupid thing to say, and really showed that Carrie did not understand what she was talking about. All sensible people knew that the amount of importance attached to killing a woodcock had nothing whatever to do with the difficulty of the feat. This touch of contradictoriness in Carrie was something quite new, and did not suit at all well with her pleasant little homely face and simple manners.

"Killed two more pheasants than last year out of the Dingle," said Sir Stephen, closing his note-book with a self-satisfied smile. "And now to lunch."

Then ensued the problem of how to comfortably seat a dozen people in a kitchen intended to accommodate six at the outside. The competition for seats was very severe, and it was only by

excessive activity that Willy secured a high-backed arm-chair for Elfrida, which she accepted with careless grace as being entirely her right. He himself was contented with a low wooden stool, which a few minutes later he felt compelled to offer Carrie Hudson, who, having seated herself in a corner of the high narrow window-seat, was now obviously suffering from a violent draught down the back of her neck.

"Let me change with you," said the young man, who was really nothing if not good-natured.

"I am very comfortable," replied Carrie stolidly.

"Oh, come, that's impossible with the wind blowing your head off. Now I can turn up my collar. Those old bad casements never fit within an inch of the window-sill."

"I like them," said Carrie, in a curt voice, which left no mistake as to her intention of staying where she was.

Willy resumed his stool, and deliberately turned his back on the draughty window-seat as an outward manifestation of the fact that he was not going to take any further interest in it or its occupant. He was tired of being snubbed by this little girl, and considered that she showed a certain obtuseness in continuing to treat him as an irrepressible lover. It occurred to him also, that, compared to other girls—Miss Gramont for instance—she had not much to say for herself, and was almost insignificant. He was careful not to waste time while making these reflections, and before his host rose from the table, he had finished off at least half a roast duck, and was rapidly demolishing a dish of tartlets.

"Time's nearly up," said Sir Stephen, glancing round the room with a look of disgust at certain of his guests who were weakly enjoying cherry-brandy and sweets. He himself, as he was never weary of explaining, lunched invariably off a beef sandwich and a glass of beer, and he felt somewhat unreasonably aggrieved when younger men departed from the simplicity of this diet. However, he was not strong enough to resist the deteriorating effect of the age, although he continued to class both hot shooting lunches, and the presence of ladies at the same, as dangerous innovations for which his wife was solely responsible. "I can allow you five minutes more," he continued, glaring at the mincepie, as if it personally annoyed him.

At this, Miss Gramont, who had long since finished her luncheon, deliberately began again, not because she was hungry, but merely as a protest against being hurried. And when shortly afterwards they all left the house, she commanded Willy to put a box of chocolate into his pocket for her in case she required further refreshment during the afternoon. To carry out this arrangement satisfactorily, of course she had to walk with him; Miss Hudson and another girl following her example, as none of the other men seemed very anxious for female society. To say the truth, Willy would willingly have dispensed with this audience, especially as his first stand was in the bottom of

a gully, where the pheasants driven out of a neighbouring covert by the beaters, would be sure to cross at a great height.

"They will be too good for me, I expect," he said diffidently.

"Oh, no! We always see great sport at this stand," replied Miss Gramont, with a smile of encouragement. "Last year Colonel Foster brought them down all round us, almost like a hailstorm."

"Of course," chimed in the other girl. "This is where he killed that rocketing pheasant. I never saw such a high—"

"Be quiet, can't you!" growled Sir Stephen from some fifty yards off. "We may just as well go home if there's to be all this chattering! They'll all break back and we shan't get a shot."

The noise of an approaching line of beaters walking through the covert was increasing every moment.

"A chocolate, please, Mr. Ranger," whispered Elfrida. "The excitement's growing too much for me."

Willy plunged his hand into his pocket, pulled out the paper box, and turned round to offer it to Miss Gramont. At that moment, with a tremendous fuss and beating of wings, out came the first cock-pheasant, and crossed the gully just above their heads. Willy dropped the box, and raising his gun, discharged both barrels rapidly in succession.

"By Jove! Forgotten to put any cartridges in since lunch!" he exclaimed in desperation, for the pheasants were coming out all round him, and on every side he could hear constant shots.

"Oh, be quick! Be quick! They'll all get away!" cried the excited girls, adding thereby infinitely to his nervous distress, as with trembling hands he fumbled with the cartridges which stuck as they had never stuck before. At last he got the gun loaded, he scarcely knew how, and discharged it just in time to blow the tail feathers out of the last cock pheasant as he crossed over.

"I've done it now," groaned Willy.

"Well, you had very bad luck," said Miss Gramont kindly.

"Was very stupid, you mean!" he interposed.

"Hardly that. You see all the other men had two guns and their loaders were responsible."

Just then up came Sir Stephen inquiring anxiously what had been done at that corner.

"Nothing," explained Willy, with the calm of despair. "They all went on." And he wondered wildly whether his host had noticed his last shot.

"Very extraordinary," muttered Sir Stephen. "They broke in the right place too! I can't understand it." Then with ominous politeness he requested Mr. Ranger to follow him, and Willy presently found himself ensconced under a hedge at the back of the covert, where during the next half-hour he had not a chance of a shot, although from the constant firing all round he gathered that his experience was unique. In fact, for the rest of the afternoon, con-

sidering what a high character the Merlyn Towers shooting bore, it was wonderful how little he saw to shoot at.

It was getting late when they beat out the last covert; so late, indeed, that the light was beginning to fail, and it was very evident that all sport was nearly over for the afternoon. Willy was feeling cold and dispirited at this flat conclusion of the day that had begun so unexpectedly well. He had seen nothing of Miss Gramont and her companions for the last two hours, they having deemed it prudent to take Sir Stephen's hints and go quietly home; carrying with them, Mr. Ranger shrewdly suspected, a somewhat poor opinion of his skill. However, it seemed as if just at the last, fortune were about to favour him. One or two rabbits came out, fairly easy shots, and he rolled them over in good style. His spirits rose. He was all on the alert to get an opportunity of showing that he was not hopelessly incompetent. At a faint movement in the fern he fired.

"Hold hard!" shouted the keeper. "It's one of her ladyship's pet bantams you've got now," he added, by way of explanation. "They are always straying out into the coverts, but I don't know that I ever remember any gentleman shooting one of them before!"

Although among the most humane of men, Willy wished sincerely that all the bantams' necks had been wrung before they came straying about in the twilight, provoking him to a last stupid mischance. Altogether he felt unusually ruffled by his day's experiences, and did not recover his equanimity until he had talked them over with Miss Gramont in a quiet corner of the hall after tea. With a few judicious comments she restored his good spirits, contriving somehow to make him see even the death of the bantam in the light of a joke, instead of regarding it as a humiliating exhibition of awkwardness. It did not take much persuasion to put Willy on good terms with himself again, and, contrary to all expectation, he had a very pleasant evening.

"My dear Elfrida," said Lady Taine, entering her niece's room as she was dressing for dinner, "I want you to do me a favour. You must get Willy Ranger to stop at home to-morrow somehow. I won't answer for your uncle if that young man goes out with him again. He says he killed nothing all day except a few things he wasn't meant to. And you know what your uncle's temper is. I can't think why the keepers are stupid enough to tell him when people don't shoot things; he can't be everywhere to see for himself. And here he is now raging away at me as if I had spoilt the whole day's sport by—"

"I suppose Mr. Ranger was asked here to shoot?" interrupted Elfrida.

"Yes, of course! And to amuse you girls, you know."

"Well, he does amuse me very much," said Elfrida calmly. "As for Carrie Hudson she doesn't seem so appreciative, but perhaps that's natural as he never speaks to her."

"Poor little Carrie! Her mother was one of my dearest friends

years ago. But of course they are a large family, and General Hudson is not at all well off. The girls haven't been about much. I daresay young men wouldn't find them very amusing. But now, how can we manage to keep Willy Ranger from shooting to-morrow? It will be very awkward, won't it?"

"Well, it will rather," said the girl reflectively. "You had better leave it entirely to me. I will arrange it somehow, but you mustn't interfere at the last and upset everything."

"No, indeed, my dear!" exclaimed Lady Taine. "You shall do exactly as you like if you can only keep him out of the way to-morrow. And you are so clever I think you will manage it too!"

Elfrida smiled. She had already evolved a scheme which ought to satisfy everybody as it combined the fulfilment of an evident duty with considerable amusement to herself. After dinner she took the earliest opportunity of sequestering Mr. Ranger from the rest of the party. This was not a difficult task. Seated in a small alcove at one end of the drawing-room, they were almost hidden behind a well arranged group of palm trees, whilst their conversation was also perfectly inaudible to the rest of the guests. This alcove was always in great demand of an evening, as being a decided relief after the formal splendour of the blue and silver saloon; but there was an air of decision about the manner in which Elfrida took possession of it that at once discouraged all other claimants. Willy followed her obediently. He was so gratified by this mark of preference, after his unsuccessful afternoon, that he even forgot to feel shy.

"I want to ask you something," said Elfrida, going straight to the point at once. "But first of all, will you promise faithfully to speak the truth?"

Willy gave a qualified assent. As a rule, his difficulty lay not in blurring out facts so much as in originating polite fictions. Yet, he had an uneasy consciousness that when people urge one to give a truthful answer they are generally about to ask some very awkward question.

"Well, it's merely this," continued Miss Gramont, "are you absolutely bent on shooting to-morrow? I mean, is your heart set on it?"

"Certainly not," replied Mr. Ranger promptly, much relieved at finding that his candour could have free play. "You see, I'm very fond of shooting, but—"

"I understand perfectly!" she exclaimed, cutting short his confession of incompetence. "It's always a surprise to me how anybody can stand Sir Stephen's hectoring and bullying two days running."

"Oh, it isn't that exactly," interposed Willy simply.

"Never mind. The whole thing is overdone here. It becomes a bore. Now for my proposal. The hounds are meeting a few miles off to-morrow. I am longing to have a gallop with them if only I could find an escort."

"Oh, can't we go?" he exclaimed, in great excitement. "Capital country about here; nice, mild, open weather—just us two! It would be the greatest fun out!" His face suddenly fell. "But, after all, it can't possibly be managed," he said sadly. "I haven't a horse here. Besides, I can't very well leave Sir Stephen with one gun short, as, after all, it was very good of him to ask me to shoot at all."

"I think I can arrange everything perfectly," replied Elfrida, "if you are sure you want to come."

Willy looked at her and felt no uncertainty upon that point.

"It will not be rude," he reiterated; "throwing over Sir Stephen, I mean?"

"I think you may make your mind quite easy upon that score," she said, in such a tone of conviction, that his last scruple was lulled to rest.

The young man's spirits rose so high after this interview, that later on in the evening he was prompted by sheer benevolence to search out Carrie Hudson, who, he had remarked, seemed rather shy and friendless. He found her sitting alone in a corner, a forlorn little figure, with the childish vivacity which had constituted her chief charm all gone out of her face and manner. At his approach she shrank back with such a look of unmistakable vexation, that the gay little speech he had prepared died away on his lips.

"I saw you were all alone—that's to say nobody was talking to you—and it seemed rather dull; I mean I noticed you when I was in the alcove, you know," stammered Willy, in some embarrassment, dimly conscious that he was not saying quite the right thing.

Indeed, there could be little doubt upon that point as Miss Hudson became scarlet, and remarked in an offended tone that she particularly enjoyed her own society.

With blundering kindness, Willy hastened to repair his error.

"Of course, I knew you liked being alone," he began. "You get tired of constantly talking, don't you? Yet I thought perhaps an old friend——" Willy hesitated. He had something that he was very anxious to say, and yet he did not know exactly how to put it. "What I meant," he continued hurriedly, "is that I am not a bit like I used to be. My feelings have changed, and all that. You need not be afraid I shall worry you any more. I see you knew best all along."

"It's extraordinarily good of you to be so explicit, Mr. Ranger!" cried Carrie passionately. "I assure you I was not borne up by any false hopes that you still cared about me!" and, without another word, she bounded off her seat and rushed out of the room.

Willy was utterly taken aback by this abrupt conclusion of his well-meant effort to establish the peace between them. He had been actuated throughout by the purest philanthropic motives, in spite of which it appeared that he had unwittingly insulted Carrie in the most

heinous manner. At least, that was evidently the interpretation she chose to put upon his words. But after all, what vexed him most was the idea that Miss Gramont might have noticed his rebuff.

The morning came, mild, damp and genial ; everything, in short, that a hunting day ought to be. Sir Stephen was so pleased at the prospect of getting rid of his incompetent young guest, that he was positively gracious to him at breakfast, and mounted him without a murmur on a half-broken carriage horse he had recently purchased. Lady Taine's scruples about her niece's unchaperoned condition were quickly stifled, when she reflected that this was the only possible method of getting Willy out of the way. The whole party came out on the terrace to see them start. Miss Gramont was looking very elegant and much at her ease on a pretty little thoroughbred mare ; whilst Willy did his best to emulate her calm until they were out of sight of the house ; a difficult task, in view of the fact that the young horse went principally backwards, and for choice perpetually strayed into flower borders and ornamental shrubs.

" You are just going to ride as far as the meet and back, aren't you ? " cried Lady Taine after them ; not that she had any grounds for this supposition, only she thought that it gave an air of propriety to the proceeding to assume that they were about to return almost immediately. Their reply was incoherent, being lost in the temporary confusion caused by the young carriage horse attempting to charge the gate-post backwards.

" He doesn't seem exactly handy," observed Elfrida, discreetly keeping outside the shower of mud resulting from her companion's evolutions.

Willy admitted that this was the case. " But," he added, in a lucid interval, when he was able to get within earshot, " he'll be all right presently. Sir Stephen says he thinks the farmer who bred him hunted him occasionally. And he told me I needn't spare him—I shan't too," he concluded viciously ; for he had been looking forward to this ride and a quiet talk, which the erratic movements of his horse now rendered practically impossible.

The meet was at the cross-roads, and as they came up the whole field filed past them and turned in at an open gate.

" I suppose we had better follow the rest ? " observed Elfrida.

" Yes, of course ! Don't you see they are going to draw the covert over there ? Don't mind me ! I must keep out of the crowd, or he'll be kicking somebody," replied Willy, in a series of jerks, as he sidled off into a corner of the field where the carriage-horse's raw gambols could not interfere with anybody's safety or comfort.

But, barely had the expectant crowd settled in silence, when there was a distant halloo, and in a moment everybody was galloping for the nearest gate or gap. Presently the field divided, the majority keeping along the boundary of the big wood, while some half dozen people turned abruptly round and hurried off an opposite way, as if

they had received special information which justified this contradictory proceeding.

Elfrida could not make up her mind which to follow, and hesitated a moment, thereby losing the good place that the mare's speed had won for her.

"Which is right? Why do they go different ways?" she inquired of a friendly old farmer who was hurrying by.

"Well, the fox he broke away t'other side of the covert, miss! But there's some as thinks they knows where he'll run, same as he did last time, so they're off to be ready for him like!" And, with this lucid explanation, he urged on his unclipped pony with repeated kicks and jogs.

Elfrida looked round in despair. She was perfectly aware that she would miss the run if her irresolution continued; but still she could not make up her mind which party to follow. At that moment she remembered her escort, and looked round to see if he could throw any light upon the subject. She was just in time to see Mr. Ranger ride at his first fence. The carriage-horse changed his mind several times about the expediency of jumping, and finally deciding in preference of the fence to the spurs, galloped into it without rising an inch.

"Oh, I hope you aren't hurt!" cried Elfrida, riding up just as Willy crawled out of the ditch covered with mud. She had to reiterate the question twice, for he was so intent upon pulling his horse out that he did not even remark her presence. It was not until the horse had reluctantly struggled up and stood with heaving sides and out-stretched neck, looking the picture of misery, that he found time to answer impatiently:

"I'm right enough if the brute hadn't covered the saddle with mud! Go on! Don't bother about me!"

Elfrida wisely decided that it was not very much use looking to him for assistance, so she turned round and resigned herself to following the crowd. Before she was half across the field, however, Willy had scrambled back into the muddy saddle, and was cramming his spurs into the young horse, who, under that stimulating influence, discovered that he could gallop much faster than he ever suspected. Elfrida saw them crash through another fence, a great improvement on the first effort, showing that the fall had been utilized as an educational experience.

They were far ahead of her now, and, by a turn of luck, cut in with the hounds just as they were mounting a long slope. She strained her eyes in the distance, and saw them topping a couple of stone walls, in and out of a ploughed field, in a manner that would have done credit to an experienced hunter. After that she lost sight of them altogether, for she understood her own limitations, and never rode across country unless she was accompanied by a cavalier qualified to open all the gates.

After trotting about the lanes for an hour or two, Miss Gramont determined to ride home with some friends, who considered that they had paid a sufficient tribute to the charms of sport when they had seen a fox found and eaten their luncheon under a hedge. She knew that it was useless to wait about for Willy. He had clean forgotten her existence, and, oddly enough, she liked him all the better for it. There was nothing apologetic, hesitating, or diffident about the way he had pushed the young horse along; covered with mud as he was, he did not look ridiculous or out of his element.

"Oh, yes, I've had a delightful day!" she said to Carrie Hudson, whom she happened to meet directly after her return.

"And Mr. Ranger?" said Carrie anxiously.

"Oh, Mr. Ranger has been with me, therefore there can be no doubt he has had a delightful day!" replied Elfrida. Then, suddenly bursting out laughing at the sight of her companion's perplexed face, she added, "You don't seem to like that idea altogether? Perhaps it will be a consolation to you to know that, when once the hounds found, I saw nothing more but the back of his head!"

But Carrie was not consoled, for she did not believe it.

III.

THE mental strain of satisfactorily conducting two days' covert shooting being now relaxed, Sir Stephen was a far more genial host that evening than he had yet appeared. He even affected to treat it as an excellent joke when Willy only just returned from hunting in time for dinner, bringing back the young horse dead lame, and so tired that he could hardly stumble along.

"I shall sell him as a made hunter if he ever recovers," said Sir Stephen next morning at breakfast. And he laughed again as his guest blushed modestly and tried to divert the conversation into other channels.

The fact was that Willy had all unwittingly rendered himself a sort of hero by his summary treatment of the young horse. The untutored behaviour of the former at starting had impressed the ladies of the party with the idea that the task of subduing such a wild beast must demand heroic courage, coupled with extraordinary agility. The combination has in all ages been popular. Another circumstance swayed public opinion in Willy's favour. Miss Gramont's manner left no room for doubt that she was more than usually interested in him, and she was acknowledged on all sides to be a very competent judge.

The days slipped merrily by. Merlyn Towers had certainly become a much more cheerful house since Sir Stephen's little band of first-class shots had dispersed. They were all contemporaries of his own, middle-aged men in whom the ruling passion for one

particular form of sport had gradually ousted all other interests. A heavy sense of their responsibilities oppressed them ; for was it not their serious mission in life to maintain the best traditions of sport in a frivolous and rapidly deteriorating generation ?

But now all was changed. Lady Taine filled up the house with young people, and prepared to give a little informal dance to the neighbours. She and Sir Stephen had always lived in the utmost harmony by strictly adhering to a system of mutual forbearance and non-interference. Only Lady Taine had certainly violated this safe rule when she persuaded her husband to invite Willy Ranger as a stop-gap.

The confusion of the hours preceding the dance was a thing not to be lightly forgotten by those whose fate it was to be present. Lady Taine affirmed a dozen times in the course of the day that it was far less trouble to give a ball in London than a tea-party in the country ; and really it seemed as if she had reason on her side, when late in the afternoon the footman looked in to say that none of the lamp-shades had come.

" My pretty coloured lamp-shades that I ordered on purpose for this evening ! " wailed poor Lady Taine. " Why, they ought to have been at the station after breakfast. The man must have made some mistake ! "

But on inquiry it appeared there was no possible mistake, except on the part of the shop that had omitted to send the lamp-shades.

For one brief moment Lady Taine gave way to despair. Then she collected her faculties, and began to search for a way out of the difficulty.

" If only the servants had troubled to tell me before it was getting dark, I could have driven to Barton and got something," she said regretfully. " There's no choice of course in the shop, but still I should be glad of anything now. Still, I can't go tearing off in the dark to see after them ; why, I should scarcely be back before the people arrive, besides being tired to death."

Then Willy stepped into the breach. He was really good-natured ; in fact, it was such a salient quality that people scarcely ever mentioned him without referring to it. Now he offered, if it was any help, to drive the pony-trap to the little town a few miles off and buy up all the available shades. Only they had better give him accurate instructions, as his taste in colouring was notoriously defective. His offer was accepted with avidity. Lady Taine was very apologetic about giving so much trouble ; but as she proceeded to explain that all the men on the place were busy moving furniture in the hall, it was evident that if the shades were to be obtained at all, he was the only person to fetch them. Ten minutes later he was waiting in the porch for the pony-trap to be brought up. It was getting dusk, and the air was sufficiently raw to make the prospect of a long drive anything but pleasant. Although he had started with a sufficiently good grace on his self-imposed task, it must be owned

that he felt a pang of regret at leaving the warm fires, brightly-lighted rooms, and cheerful party for two hours of chilly solitude. And after all, the reality turned out so very different to his expectations. For as the pony-trap rattled up to the door, a figure closely muffled in a long fur cloak glided out of the hall past him, and, dismissing the groom, took the reins.

"Jump in quietly! There's no need to ring the bell or anything of that sort," said Miss Gramont in a low voice. Willy obeyed in stupefied silence, and in another moment they were off.

"Are you coming?" he gasped, when they were half-way down the drive.

"Well, it seems like it!" replied Elfrida, enjoying his perplexed face in the twilight. "There, you can take the reins now," she added, "and I will keep my hands warm. I only snatched them temporarily because I thought we should get off quicker. There would be no end to the fuss if they once found out I was getting a breath of fresh air. Lady Taine alone would prophesy every conceivable evil result, ranging from consumption to rheumatic fever."

Willy was plunged in reflection for some minutes, trying to puzzle out why a girl who had spent most of the day lounging over a fire in an arm-chair should develop such an abnormal craving for fresh air just as it became cold and dark. He was not imaginative, and the idea that Elfrida found a welcome excitement in rushing off through the twilight, when everybody thought she had retired to her room with a headache, did not even occur to him. After some time his meditations took the agreeable form of believing she must have come out of kindness to himself.

"I wonder why you ventured out in the cold?" he began timidly.
"Was it because you thought I was bored at going alone?"

"Oh, dear no! Only because I felt morally convinced that you could never choose the lamp-shades by yourself."

"That was all, was it?" murmured Willy, feeling more vexed than the occasion warranted. He was additionally mortified by hearing unmistakable sounds of merriment by his side.

"Well, what is there funny about that?" he said bluntly.

"Oh, everything! Can't you see it?" laughed Elfrida. He shook his head sulkily. "I'm sorry if I was rude," she continued; "but you shouldn't be so literal. Now did you expect me to admit that your society and a cold fog were preferable to all the luxurious fascinations of Merlyn Towers?"

Willy was radiant. He did not quite understand her, but divined vaguely that the lamp-shades did not play the important part in deciding her actions that he had feared a few moments previously. Even when she added that the house was getting so uncomfortable in preparation for the evening that any change was preferable to remaining in it, he was not discouraged. He flattered himself that he was getting past the stage of mutual misunderstanding.

That drive in the fast fading twilight was like a pleasant dream, in spite of the chill night air, and it seemed all too soon that the pony clattered through the narrow streets of the tiny country town and drew up in front of the principal ironmonger's shop.

"But we don't want churns or a watering-pot!" cried Willy, in a tone of dismay, as he surveyed the contents of the window, dimly illuminated by one jet of very provincial gas.

"You don't know the resources of Barton," declared Miss Gramont. "There is one whole counter in that shop exclusively devoted to lamps and their accessories. You had better throw a rug over the pony, for I shall be some time bargaining."

However, Willy's patience was not very severely tried. In less than five minutes she hurried out with a gesture of despair.

"Only three shades in the shop, and they are all the most hideous colours imaginable! The man says he can procure any tint we like from London in a couple of days. So useful, isn't it? What shall we do?"

"Take the three shades," said Willy decided, "and get home as fast as we can. I think it is beginning to snow."

Elfrida got into the carriage, and he pulled the fur rug tightly up round her.

"Give me the precious shades," she said. "They must be kept very dry and safe; for have not they been purchased at the complete sacrifice of our complexions for the evening?"

"I don't see that it matters, if you don't catch a cold," said Willy stolidly.

"Nor do I," chimed in Elfrida, who, knowing by experience that her extreme fairness defied any atmospheric attacks, was always rather fond of jesting about complexions. "I rather prefer being beetroot colour myself," she added lightly. "It's so cheerful of an evening. I always think little Miss Hudson's face in frosty weather is as good as an extra lamp in the room. Haven't you noticed it?"

"She is rather sunburnt," said Willy apologetically, and wishing the conversation would turn on some other topic.

"Sunburnt hardly describes it," persisted Elfrida—"unless you mean in the sense in which a brick is sunburnt. Perhaps it would be kind of us to tell her we have a green shade here that would take the colour out of a crimson peony that was sufficiently injudicious to sit under it?"

Willy murmured something inarticulate. It was base of him, he felt, even tacitly to countenance this mockery of an old friend. On the other hand, he had not the courage to offend Miss Gramont by even the shadow of a reproof. So he remained silent, deriving what justification he could for his conduct from the recollection that, though in a certain sense an old friend, Carrie had never yet omitted an opportunity of snubbing him.

But Elfrida's thoughts were presently diverted into another channel by the uncertain movements of the pony.

"Why does he totter about like that? You can't be driving him properly," she said, pushing aside the wraps round her face and peering out into the darkness.

"It really isn't my fault," explained Willy. "The snow is balling so fast inside his feet that he is regularly on stilts. Besides, the road is becoming very heavy. I shall walk up this hill so that we may get on a little faster."

"Do you mean that you expect me to sit still by myself with the pony threatening to come on his head every moment?" demanded Elfrida.

"Well, I'm afraid he can't pull us both up the hill——"

"Then we will both get out," she interrupted; and in spite of arguments and cautions she insisted on walking by Willy's side all the rest of the way home. There was but little opportunity for conversation, as leading the pony and endeavouring to keep it on its legs absorbed his entire attention. Elfrida's golden hair had completely disappeared under a veil of snow before they reached their journey's end, and she was aching all over from the unusually hard walk.

"I think we will try to get modestly in at a side door," she said, as the welcome lights of Merlyn Towers shone through the trees. "No need to let everybody see what extraordinary figures we look." She still cherished a secret hope that nobody had discovered her absence, and that she would be able to slip up to her room without observation. As it turned out, the excitement of the expedition had been rather more intense and less agreeable than she had anticipated.

"I am afraid you are cold, and wet, and tired," said Willy remorsefully, as they waited outside the door. "Of course, you are sorry you ever came?"

Now Elfrida was indeed feeling wretched to a quite unusual degree, and for the last half hour she had been regretting her imprudence more bitterly every step. Still she sensibly remembered that it would not mend matters to lose her temper.

"I think I should have come even if I had foreseen the snow," she murmured softly.

"That is good of you indeed!" cried Willy, quite carried away by her sweetness. "I can never thank you enough," he continued, snatching at her hand—"never! if I live——"

The door was opened suddenly behind them, shooting a long ray of light out across the lawn, and putting an effectual stop to this eloquent address.

Miss Gramont ran rapidly up to her room, whilst Willy, handing the lamp-shades over to the servant, shook off some of the superfluous snow before going in search of Lady Taine to report the success of his mission.

The dance that evening went off capitally. Although nominally impromptu, every detail had been most carefully arranged to ensure success, and, as Lady Taine observed, the advantage of an informal entertainment is that one need not invite any bores to it. This programme being successfully carried out, it resulted that the majority of the guests were young, active, and fairly good-looking. The only chaperons admitted were those safe to do credit to the party either by their clothes or their wits.

A good deal of comment was excited by Miss Gramont's conduct in appearing very late, and then scarcely dancing at all. The majority of her acquaintances were inclined to attribute this deviation from her usual custom at dances merely to affectation and the desire to excite attention. This amiable interpretation of her motives was so general that several people went so far as to ascribe the exaggerated languor of her manner entirely to an artistic sense of what was required to successfully carry out the character she had assumed for the evening. None of them guessed the simple truth—that she was so utterly worn out after her long walk through the snow that it required all her resolution to dress and appear at all.

Before she joined the party Willy could settle to nothing. He wandered aimlessly up and down, with his eyes fixed on the door, for fear he might miss the first chance of asking her to dance. Once Lady Taine searched him out, and playfully reproached him for not making himself more generally useful when there were so many nice girls still without partners.

"Miss Hudson, for instance, has not danced yet," she said suggestively.

"I did not know—I will see about it," stammered Willy, rousing himself with a start from his contemplation of the empty doorway. He felt rather remorseful when he saw Carrie sitting alone on some raised benches at one end of the hall where the dancing was going on. Feeling that he had permitted somewhat unkind reflections at her expense to pass unrebuted, he was now anxious to atone for this want of friendliness on his part by a little extra cordiality. Besides, in spite of adverse criticisms, she was really a nice young girl, though now from some cause lacking in the animation that had made her a favourite.

But there was no want of life about her when Willy humbly petitioned a dance. She glared at him a moment as if she had not rightly heard his request, and then snapping out: "No thank you! Certainly not!" deliberately turned her back on him.

Willy was furious at this public rebuff, which after all, owing to Carrie's childish looks and manner, had more the air of a nursery quarrel than anything serious. He walked quickly away determining that he would never give her a chance of insulting him in this babyish fashion again. However, after the first few moments of mortification were over, he was glad that she had declined to dance with him, as

now he should be able to return and stand by the door awaiting Miss Gramont.

When Elfrida at last entered he flew to her side, begging for dances with more zeal than discretion. But he was not now dealing with a passionate little girl, who blurted out everything she thought, and offended people without having the least intention of doing so. Miss Gramont managed him so skilfully that he was eventually quite satisfied with a couple of turns round the hall, and left off feeling somehow as if he had received distinguished marks of her favour. She also confided in him that she was so tired she could not possibly do any more, and allowed him to find her a comfortable seat where she could lounge undisturbed, whilst he sat on a low stool at her side.

"Now it's no use anybody bothering me to dance," she said, when comfortably installed. "I cannot and will not move again. Let me see, I must have something to account for this unusual lassitude. It shall be a headache. That has generally been received as a ladylike complaint, and won't debar me from eating supper."

"Can't I get you something now?" inquired Willy anxiously.

"Absolutely nothing. If I am left alone I may survive the evening, though I was never quite so tired before. Oh, it isn't your fault!" as he gave a gesture of despair. "If I had not been so afraid of the pony tumbling down I need not have walked at all. It all went off most successfully, except that I met Miss Hudson just as I was running up to my room covered with snow. She looked first as if she had seen a ghost, and then horribly shocked——"

"Why should she look shocked?" inquired Willy indignantly. His feelings had reached a stage of blind admiration in which the bare idea of criticising Miss Gramont appeared sheer sacrilege. He had not a notion of how all this bewildering condition of feeling was going to end, and he had not the courage to look forward forty-eight hours to when his visit should be over.

It was a dreadful disappointment to find next morning that Sir Stephen had already arranged a last day's amusement for his guest. Willy's good nature and simplicity had quite propitiated his host, whose conscience was now beginning to reproach him with a certain lack of hospitality.

"I've got a nice bit of rough shooting left for to-day," he observed at breakfast. "Some of the out-lying woods and dingles. There's a good deal of fun to be got out of them if you are game for a long walk."

Willy grunted acquiescence, reflecting sadly as he did so that at this rate his moments with Miss Gramont were numbered.

"I have told the keeper to get together some beaters, and sent round for two or three of my neighbours to join us," said Sir Stephen. "We will start at eleven sharp."

"Perhaps if it is fine we will stroll out and look on in the after-

noon," observed Elfrida; and Willy greeted her suggestion with a grateful smile. In fact, this now became the point in the day towards which all else tended. He continually looked at the sky, and consulted his companions as to the chances of continued fine weather, with the sole view of ascertaining whether she would be able to come. And when at last he looked up, and saw her approaching in a bright gleam of wintry sunshine, it seemed almost too good to be true.

Carrie Hudson did not go out to join the shooters that afternoon. Although naturally a sociable little thing, she preferred her own society, and a solitary walk up and down the deserted garden terrace, to a repetition of the misery she had undergone the last few days. This visit was the one wretched experience in her hitherto merry little life, and she thankfully realized that it was now nearly over. She was beginning to hate the handsome house, which seemed to her heated imagination nothing but a stage for exhibiting Elfrida's beauty and conquests. She had seen enough of both of them, and only wanted to get quietly home, and be troubled no more with these wild jealous feelings. Her reflections were at this point interrupted by the sound of hurried footsteps, and turning she saw Willy striding across the end of the terrace towards the house.

"Why, how early you have finished shooting!" she exclaimed; and then something in his face striking her as unusual, she added: "Nothing is the matter, is it?"

"Oh, nothing! nothing!" he replied irritably.

"But then why are you back so—"

"So early?" he interrupted. "Well, you shall hear the whole story. Perhaps it will amuse you!" he added violently. "You'll like to know that I've made such a complete fool of myself at last that I shall probably never touch a gun again."

"What do you mean?"

"Mean, indeed! Why I mean what I say, of course. Do you know what I've done? Shot a beater!"

"And killed him?" screamed Carrie, starting backwards.

"Killed him, indeed!" reiterated Willy scornfully. "He may walk a little lame for the next week, that's all. But Sir Stephen was furious—naturally. He said he should shut up shooting for the day; but of course I couldn't have that, so I walked straight home."

"But if nobody's hurt, I don't see that there is much harm done," observed Carrie.

"No harm, indeed! When I have made such an utter fool of myself!" Willy strode along frowning moodily. "It isn't pleasant, I can tell you, to be laughed at by everybody—even people you thought liked you."

"Miss Gramont, for instance?" said Carrie, an explanation of his excessive depression having just occurred to her.

"Yes, Miss Gramont!" he repeated, the last remnants of pride

breaking down before a strange craving he felt for sympathy. "I heard her laughing with one of those other men about me. She was telling him how I killed the bantam." Poor Willy's voice sank into a tragic whisper. He was suffering far too acutely from disappointment and mortified feeling to perceive any trace of the ridiculous in this harrowing statement.

Neither did Carrie. Clenching her little fist, she muttered between her teeth :

"She has treated you shamefully! I hate her!"

This was such a very strong expression of opinion, that Willy, momentarily forgetting his own grievances, turned to examine his companion's flushed and tearful countenance. And then suddenly the truth was revealed to him.

"Do you mean to say you've cared for me—I mean haven't disliked me all this time?" he stammered.

"Oh, Willy, how could you be so stupid?" was her slightly irrelevant reply. But it answered the purpose of turning his thoughts into quite a fresh channel.

Of course, when Carrie Hudson's engagement was announced a few days later, there was some critics who did not fail to point out that the young man must have been solely actuated by pique when he made her an offer. A few particularly solicitous friends added that such fickle conduct promised ill for the matrimonial happiness of the young couple. But Willy himself felt no doubts upon this point. He did not expect ever to admire his wife as much as he had done Miss Gramont; but on the other hand he had the comfortable conviction that neither would he ever be required to sink into a mere background to her charms.

"Things have really settled themselves remarkably well," observed Lady Taine, beaming with delight over the good fortune which had befallen the daughter of an old friend, mainly through her instrumentality. "Besides," she added, "Elfrida really ought to do much better. I find that it is very uncertain about that Yorkshire property after all!"

THE RUBY HEART.

BY E. NESBIT.

AUNT JESSICA had been round the world more than once. She had been what is vulgarly called a "globe-trotter." In her day she had collected many rare and curious and beautiful things; but now she was an old woman, and her time was come to die in the great, silent house, filled with the furniture that had belonged to Aunt Jessica's forbears many score years ago, and enriched by the spoils of many lands, brought home by the energetic hands of Aunt Jessica herself.

There was one treasure above all that I coveted, and that I would have sold my soul to have had for my own—my Cousin Edith.

As for the money, well, I am not more disinterested than most people; but I would rather have had Edith without a penny, than all Aunt Jessica's money without Edith.

William and Bertram and I were sitting in the dining-room. Edith was above, helping poor aunt in the hard work of dying. Three raps came on the floor. We knew they were a signal that we were to go up and that aunt had asked for us; and up we went.

"I have left everything divided among you four," she said; "and the ruby heart is to go to whichever of you three boys can find it." She spoke slowly and with difficulty.

I remembered the jolly old days when she used to come and see us at school and tip us, and I wished that death and time could have been more merciful. She went on:—

"You know it has a charm to make you happy in your love. It would have made me happy, but he died, and it hadn't a chance to do its work; and now my time's come—it has been weary waiting."

And with that—the first and last hint we ever had of a romance in my aunt's life—she turned her wrinkled old face to the pillow with a sigh like a tired child's, and there were only four of us left in the room.

After the funeral and the reading of the will, we three men set to work to find the charm.

"I shall take the library and aunt's bed-room first," said Bertram. As these were the rooms she had most used, I imagine he thought he had made the best choice. "You other fellows can arrange as you like!"

William chose the drawing-room and the guest chamber, and they took the whole day searching systematically inch by inch for the ruby heart. I began to look in the dining-room, but Edith came in.

"Do you care so very much for the ruby heart?" said she.

"I confess I should like to find it," I answered.

"Shall I help you to look?"

She pulled out a book or two from the shelves in an aimless, desultory way, and then said:

"It's very sunshiny out of doors, don't you think?"

So we went on the river.

The next day I began to look for the heart again. Edith sent her duenna-companion (who had once been her governess) to ask me if I didn't think it would be nice to drive. Of course, I said I thought it would, and off we went.

That evening she asked Bertram and William if they would like to come out next day to see some ruins.

"Thanks," said Bertram; "but I think my first duty to poor aunt's memory is to find that heart."

"Besides," said William, who never had much sentiment like Bertram, "it's worth thousands of pounds, I believe!"

"To say nothing of the charm," I added.

"But you'll come, Wilfrid?" she said, looking at me with her soft grey eyes.

"Of course," I answered.

Bertram and William scowled at me. They would have given their ears, their lives, anything, in short, but their chances of a ruby heart worth thousands of pounds, for the privilege that was to be mine to-morrow.

To be in love with Cousin Edith was a mode, a fashion among us. Besides Edith was now an heiress.

"As soon as I have fulfilled dear aunt's last wishes," said Bertram—he talked, the silly fool, as if aunt had wished *him* to find the heart—"I shall be only too glad to accompany my Cousin Edith on any excursion she may propose."

"So shall I," said William.

So Edith and I went to the ruins alone together.

"I hope it does not seem like disrespect to poor aunt's memory," she said, as we drove snugly back in the dogcart that evening, "our going out like this. But I couldn't bear to stay in the old house alone where she was so kind to me. It's better to go out, and I'm sure she would have wished it."

I felt that it was foolish of me not to make an effort to find the ruby heart. So next morning I got up very early and came down before the servants were about. I had pulled out half the drawers of the Chinese cabinet and looked into them, when my heart leaped into my mouth at the touch of a hand on my shoulder—Edith's!

"Still after that wretched ruby!" she said. "How you waste your time!"

"Why? Don't you think I shall find it?"

"I don't know" she said looking at me with her eyes very wide

open ; "but I don't think you will find it *there*, because Bertram has been through that three times already. Did you ever eat strawberries before breakfast and gather them yourself ?"

So we went into the kitchen garden and ate strawberries till the gong rang for breakfast. Bertram and William were getting quite sulky and savage, from the non-success of their search ; and the little time I had devoted to it annoyed them.

"I believe," said Bertram, with an air of gaiety, a little overdone, "that Wilfrid thinks he knows where the heart is, and that he can put his hand on it at any moment."

"I wish I could," I said.

"So do I," said Edith, almost in the same breath.

"You wish Wilfrid to find the heart !" said William. "Why?"

"Oh, no. I don't mean Wilfrid ; I meant—at least—Well, we shall all be glad when it's settled one way or the other, shan't we?"

I had never told Edith I loved her, because I didn't know how my aunt intended to leave her money, and if Edith were to be the heiress of the whole—but anyone will understand my reasons.

It was a week after aunt's funeral that I went into the rose garden where Edith was snipping roses into a basket.

"I've been looking for the heart again," I said, "but I haven't found it."

"No," she answered ; "and I don't suppose you will. Would a *Gloire de Dijon* be any compensation ?"

She began to stick one in my coat as she spoke. Her slender waist in its black gown was very near my left arm where she stood.

"I will take the bud," I said, "but not as compensation for the heart."

"Don't you think," she asked me, "that it might be possible to live happily without a charm to help you ?"

"No," I said, "not without a charm to help you. But ruby hearts are not the only charms in the world."

My arm fell on her waist.

"Let them find their ruby heart ! Let them chop it in pieces and divide it between them and sell the bits," said I.

"And you are content with what you have ?" she asked.

"I am content with what I have," I answered ; and my other arm went round her.

* * * * *

They never found that ruby heart, though the poor old house was tapped and tested from top to bottom. At last, wearied out, they took the portion of goods that fell unto them and went, fortunately for us, into a far country. And Edith and I were married.

We didn't go on a wedding tour, but came straight back to the dear old house.

On the evening of our wedding-day we walked in the moonlight through the rose-garden to listen to the nightingales. I stopped to

hold her in my arms on the very spot where I had first kissed her, and the light shawl she wore round her head and shoulders fell back.

"What's that you have round your neck?" I said; for something darkened amid the white laces on her breast.

She did not answer. I put up my hand, touched with a thrill the whiteness of her neck, and found in my fingers the ruby heart!

"Then she gave it to *you*," I said; "it is *yours*?"

"She gave it into my keeping," answered Edith, dropping her chin till her lips rested on my hand; "but she left it to the man who should find it."

"And I have found it—here!"



J E P H T H A .

RASH Jephtha, when, with martial ardour burning,
He breathed the vow that robbed his soul of rest,

But little dreamed, from the red field returning,

To meet the thing he loved on earth the best—

The maiden who, in all youth's sweetest charms,

Runs from the door and rushes to his arms,

But, ah, is to an aching bosom pressed!

Dread words, in an unguarded moment spoken,

But heard, received, recorded now on high;

The vow once written there must not be broken.

Cold tremors seize his frame, tears fill his eye—

"Oh, to have fallen upon the fatal field!

Far better borne home dead upon my shield

Than thus live on, and she—and she to die!"

"Nay, 'tis no time for tears, but triumph rather,

Thy conquering sword has set our country free;
This bosom now may be its sheath, my father,

And death will not be terrible from thee!

The Hebrew maiden shall not shame her sire,

And Gilead's girls long, on the golden lyre,

Shall sing our fame when both have ceased to be!"

* * * * *

And yearly came her old companions, weeping,

To scatter flowers o'er her unconscious clay;
The fairest flower of all, though, there lay sleeping,

And, like the fairest, first to pass away!

No bright face now met Jephtha's at his door,
Nor voice, nor footstep made him music more,

And over all his life a shadow lay.

LINDON MEADOWS.

THE VALLEY OF THE RHONE.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "LETTERS FROM MAJORCA," "THE ROMANCE OF SPAIN," ETC., ETC.



RUINS OF MONASTERY, VILLENEUVE.

TO visit Avignon is to fall in love with it. Certain tastes will like certain places, but all tastes must love this City of the Popes.

The place itself, taken as a whole, is not specially attractive. It resembles many another fairly thriving town in its narrow streets and modern houses. Here and there you come upon an ancient building; an old palace of the cardinals that has escaped destruction, standing out as a splendid monument of the days gone by; and for one such record, you are willing to put up with a whole street

of modern outlines: nineteenth century barbarities.

But some of the ancient buildings were not palaces. Processions gorgeous in scarlet, had never passed through their doors. No triple-crowned pope had pronounced a blessing upon the inmates on crossing the threshold, for the triple-crown never had crossed it. They were more humble records of the Middle Ages, given up to commerce. The voice of the merchant, self-asserting, self-interested was heard within the panelled rooms, not so keen and rasping then as now, because competition was less great, wealth was less considered; men were larger and broader-minded—and they had things more their own way.

Wonderfully picturesque are these isolated remains, with their gables

and latticed panes, and dormer windows ; with slanting red-tiled roofs distinguished by that exquisite tone that marks the remnants of the Middle Ages.

These rare examples of the past make one's walks in Avignon very pleasant. There is the element of uncertainty running through all. You never know at what moment you may chance upon a new discovery : a thirteenth or fourteenth century gem—until you have become thoroughly acquainted with the city. Then you make straight for certain points, and feast your eyes upon outlines that never cease to charm. Why have we fallen into opposite extremes in these days—towns more hideous than the wildest nightmare ever imagined ?

One such gabled house in Avignon was especially striking, and standing near the market-place, was the centre of life and sound and movement.

It happened to be market day, and a very lively scene was going on. Under the covered area, it is true, there were no signs or tokens of the Middle Ages. Those interesting men and women with their costumes and curious language had long slept with their fathers. Very little of the picturesque remained.

Yet what remained had its charm. The stalls with their fruits and vegetables were artistic and tempting ; comely women, under their umbrellas were bright and animated ; some of them speaking a patois not more intelligible than the tongue of the Middle Ages. There was great bargaining going on ; a Babel of sound ; buyers and sellers storming at each other as though they had been deadliest of foes and were about to draw knives or pistols : but ending up with a laugh and a handshake (the only market-place in which we ever saw any hand-shaking) : and a cry of "A la prochaine fois" on the part of the seller, and an answering "Si vous êtes plus raisonnable" from the buyer.

Of course we came in for any amount of shrieking from enterprising dames and damsels ; and if H. C. had had his own way, it would have been a second edition of the affair outside the church walls of St. Rémy. But here we saw no artistic pottery ; perhaps because we did not light upon the exact spot. The only artistic thing we did discover was the gabled house alluded to, before which we stood entranced.

One part of the straggling building had been turned into an inn. Leaded panes looked out upon a great courtyard, half filled to-day with market carts, very picturesque with their quaint shafts and sides and circular hoods. The rooms within were dark with panelled oak, and beams black and heavy stretched across the low ceilings. Massive staircases led upwards to other panelled rooms, with more low ceilings and cross beams, and wonderful latticed windows.

The jarring element, the note of discord in this perfect remnant, was the modern furniture, out of place as a duck's egg in a hen's nest. But only a well-preserved palace or museum would have kept intact the movable decorations of four or five centuries ago.

One longed for ancient tapestry, old armour, other signs and tokens of a past age of chivalry and romance. Had the power been ours, we would have peopled the rooms with visible ghosts. Joanna of Naples should have come in arm in arm with Clement VI., wearing his triple crown, his Holiness fascinated by her feminine charms; the six scarlet cardinals who received her following close upon their heels. Under the gorgeous dais flashing with gems surrounded by cardinals, queen and pope should have held a reception of the great people of the time. We would have had Louis of Hungary kneeling at the feet of Joan praying her pardon for his seditious rising. (But here we should have been swayed more by beauty than justice: Louis doubtless had right on his side in wishing to avenge the murder of his brother.) Petrarch and Rienzi should have followed arm in arm, the one crowned with laurel, the other only with his self-destroying pride. Whilst Rienzi delivered an eloquent speech pleading for the Restoration of Rome, Petrarch, mesmerised by the beauty of Joan's flashing eyes, in soft voice thrilling with love-tones, should have murmured one of his Sonnets to Laura—appreciated and approved by Joanna. Charles IV. of Austria and Jean le Bon of France, brother monarchs, should have come in hand in hand: the weak face of the Austrian, the amiable yet more determined expression of Jean contrasting with each other. The courtyard we would have filled with soldiery and ecclesiastics; cloak and cowl side by side with sword and helmet; every order having its representative—and we have seen that the orders were legion.

But alas, however good the will, the power to conjure the ghosts was wanting. We had to content ourselves with the architectural outlines of those past ages which had outlived the picturesque and stirring times of the popes.

And making a short circuit, and a steep climb upwards, we presently found ourselves in front of the vast palace in which the popes had lived and moved and had their sumptuous being.

As we have said, its glory has departed, but its extent may still be measured. The lofty yellow walls stood before us, sad and melancholy, for it was impossible to avoid contrasting the present with the past.

Here the seven popes of Avignon had held sway for the best part of a century: for more than a century, if we include the three antipopes, who prolonged the papal rule another forty years. Here scenes of gorgeous pageantry had taken place; of revelry and dissipation that have become historical. Here the popes ruled the world, and exercised their will, and woe to those who defied them. Imprisonment, a dismal dungeon, the oublie, a life secretly ended, these were some of the terrors that awaited any who dared oppose the papal pleasure.

Here indeed it was not difficult to conjure up any amount of ghostly ceremonial. It needed no vivid imagination to fill the great courtyard—the *Cour d'honneur*—with a gorgeous assemblage.

These enormous dimensions rendered the possibilities for display almost unlimited.

The whole place has now been turned into barracks ; halls have been divided and subdivided ; all the splendours of decoration, most of the frescoes, have disappeared. One may well say that the place is desecrated ; though military discipline has taken the place of pomp and revelry.

It was in the early barrack days of 1815 that so much damage was done. At that time the soldiers were more undisciplined, had it more their own way, could do and dare acts that would to-day bring their fortunes to a summary ending. They were the days when "le petit caporal" had swept his sword through Europe, not caring what traces his men left behind them, so they won his battles ; days when a stroke of his pen created monarchs or brought them down.

We passed through hall after hall, and thought we should never come to an end of them. In days gone by they must have been magnificent indeed. Though subdivided, many were still enormous. Most of them were given up to the soldiers. One was fitted up as a perfect armoury. A splendid staircase of stone led up to the great hall, the Salle du Consistoire. Here popes and cardinals had assembled in solemn conclave to settle the affairs of church and state, and launch forth edicts. Its magnificent vaulted roof was painted in fresco by Martini in 1339, when Benedict XXII. was pope. One can still faintly trace some of the outlines : figures of the Old Testament prophets with fluttering garments and long waving hair and grand heads, and sybils on a blue ground.

Next to this came the enormous Salle de Conseil, so large that it has been divided into rooms and two floors.

Throughout, the palace walls are said to be seventeen or eighteen feet deep. The entrance was defended by drawbridges, a portcullis and iron gates. Above this well-guarded entrance was the balcony, from which the pope blessed the people on all great occasions. At such times the great square must have been almost as imposing a spectacle as the great square of St. Peter's at Rome.

We ascended the Tower of St. John, with its two chapels : the pope's chapel on the ground floor, the vaulted chapel of the Inquisition above it. They form perhaps the most interesting part of the palace as it now exists. The frescoes are better preserved than those in the large halls. In the chapel of the pope one traced the life of John the Baptist : in that of the Inquisition, scenes from Martial, Stephen, Peter and Valerian, painted by Martini and his pupils.

We went on to the Chamber of Torture : the Salle de la Question, as it was called, where the weak confessed, and the strong died. A curious room, with funnel-shaped walls, and nothing terrible about it but the recollection of past horrors. From this a flight of steps led down to a dungeon in which Rienzi was for a short time imprisoned ; and still beneath this was an *oubliette*, sunk far below the foundations

of the palace. One shuddered when looking into impenetrable darkness.

Close to the Tower of the Inquisition was the *Tour de la Glacière*, into whose depths, in 1791, sixty innocent victims, men and women, were thrown by a band of democrats. As the prisoners were dragged from the cells, a dagger was plunged into them, and where life was not extinct, they were hurled from above. In that latter part of the last century demons were let loose upon the earth.

One of our last visits was to the *Tour de Trouillas*, where Rienzi lived his five years in chains. Here Petrarch visited him, obtained him many small favours, and finally succeeded in getting him restored to liberty.

This is one of the six remaining towers of the palace. Originally there were seven: and an old saying ran that, so many towers, so many popes.

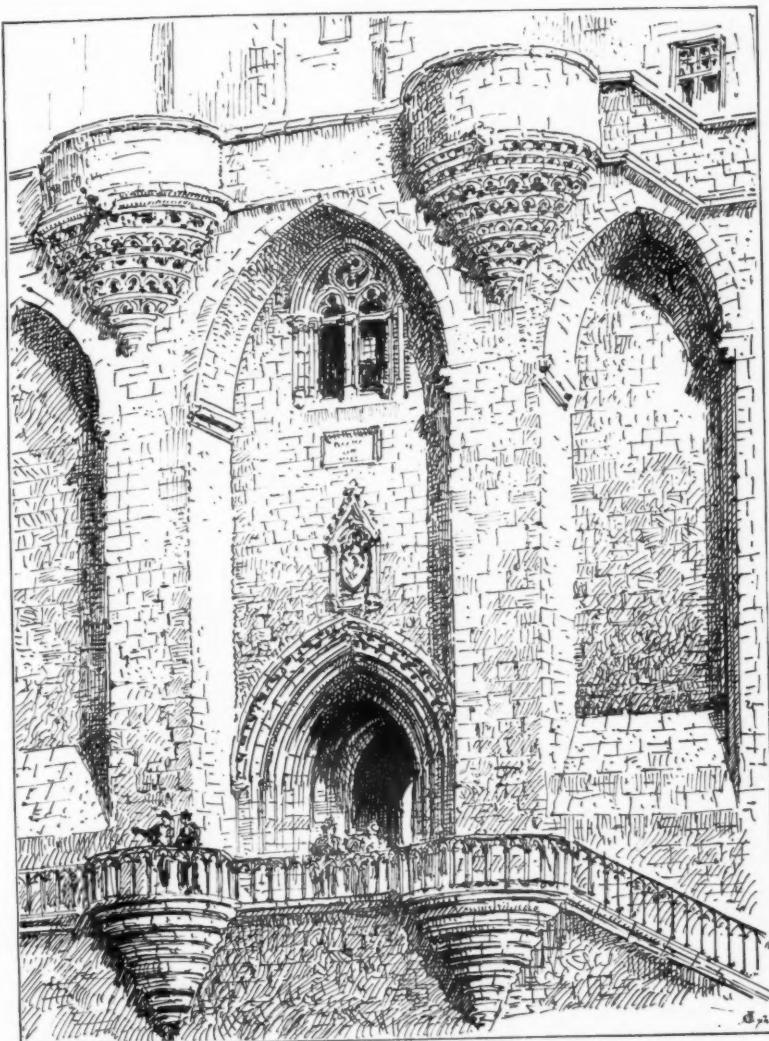
The only atmosphere now ruling the palace is military. There are soldiers at every turn, bugles for ever sounding. Several guides take you in charge at different times; there is a great ceremony of locking and unlocking doors; you are as much looked after as though it were possible to carry off the remaining frescoes, or bring down the massive walls. Your last guide politely sees you off the premises with an intimation, "Monsieur, la visite est faite; plus rien à voir;" and the douceur brings the usual imperial bow.

There is still a suspicion of greatness and grandeur about the palace. Its vast height and size must always be imposing. The great courtyards, enormous rooms, magnificent staircase down which popes and cardinals swept "in all the pomp and pleasure of pride," these cannot fail to recall those past times of regal splendour, when Avignon, in a sense, was almost mistress of the world, and the pageantries of Rome and the power of Rome had taken up their abode within her walls.

To pass out by the great entrance, once guarded by drawbridges, portcullis and iron gates, was to leave a world still haunted by the shadows of royalty for all the commonplace impressions of this nineteenth century.

And yet as long as you linger in the great square, the impression can never be commonplace.

Just above the palace the Cathedral is reached by a long flight of steps; perched on the impregnable rock, overlooking the broad waters of the Rhone. Though Romanesque and dating back to the eleventh century, it is not very imposing, for it has been terribly restored and rebuilt. The façade is a projecting porch, with a circular arch supported by fluted Corinthian columns: a porch so Roman in character, that it has been mistakenly supposed to have once formed the porch of a Pagan temple. The massive west tower is spoilt by being made the support for an octagonal base, on which stands a hideous statue of the Virgin. Much of the interior has been



CHIEF ENTRANCE, PALACE OF THE POPES.

ruined, but it is richly decorated, the galleries of the nave having rich Renaissance balustrades of marble.

None of the side-chapels date earlier than the fourteenth century many are later. In the Chapel of St. Joseph was once a passage leading to the palace. It now forms the ante-chamber to the sacristy, and contains the magnificent Gothic tomb of John XXII. Once it stood in the nave, where it must have been far more effective. Over it is a Gothic canopy, very English in character, which has been compared with the tomb of Edward II. in Gloucester Cathedral. It is of the same school as the "Eleanor Crosses." The chief architect for the latter was John of Battle: "Johannes de Bello," as he is called in the foundation roll. John of Barnack and William the Irishman ("de Hebernia") assisted him—the latter as sculptor. It becomes a great question whether any of these found their way to Avignon—so accounting for the English work of these splendid tombs. When we find Italians at work in Westminster Abbey some years before this date—and a little later on Flemish architects and workmen at Lancaster and Lavenham in Suffolk—the probability seems largely increased. In the Middle Ages architects and carvers wandered very much about the civilised world, in search of work and ideas. Many a genius carried his ideas with him, but found little in return.

This tomb of John XXII. has been much mutilated. The statues were taken out of their niches at the time of the Revolution, when the reclining effigy of the pope also suffered. Nevertheless it remains a rich and beautiful monument of that age. The papal throne still stands in the choir, and is used by the archbishop. It is of white marble, decorated with the Winged Ox of St. Luke and the Lion of St. Mark. Near it we found the tomb of the "brave Crillon," so beloved by Henri IV.

Behind the Cathedral is the Promenade du Rocher des Doms. If Avignon had nothing else to offer in return for a visit, the world might well flock to it in pilgrimage. It is doubtful whether France possesses another view so lovely, and the world itself can have few fairer scenes.

We stand on the edge of the perpendicular rock, 300 feet high. At our feet runs the broad and beautiful Rhone. The half-ruined Pont St. Bénézet, with its little chapel, stands out above the waters. Near the splendid Rhone flows the Durance, with its troubled waters, and for very far we trace the winding rivers running like broad threads of silver through the land. Around us on all sides are the vast rich plains, here bounded by hills, there by the far-off Mediterranean.

In the distance we could almost see Arles, and it brought back a flood of recollections. All its antiquities and Roman remains; our Barmecide banquets at the hotel; Madame's dignity making protestations impossible; her great tact in warding off an unpleasant subject; the acuteness of her hearing as a last resource in putting an

end to a conference ; our moonlight walk in the cloisters ; Henri Roger, with all his fire and enthusiasm, healthy dreams and ambitions —should we ever see it all again ?

There, outside Arles, we just discerned the ruins of Mont Majour and Les Baux : the latter too wonderful to be taken in at a single visit. The eagle-owl was still captive, the guide's appeal still rang in our ears : "Prenez le, monsieur ; acceptez le ; il vous fera plaisir !" Already we began to feel the appeal would not be in vain. Towards the north-west, losing themselves in the sky, rose the wild mountains of the Cevennes ; "le Désert," as its people called it ; the last stronghold, as we have seen, of persecuted Protestantism in France. To the east was Mont Ventoux, with the ancient town of Orange at its base : a conspicuous, isolated spur of the Alps, easily ascended, and from which a splendid panorama is visible. The Alps rise beyond the Durance, whose waters may be compared to a silver thread ; those of the Rhone to a substantial cable.

We overlook the Palace of the Popes ; the whole town of Avignon, enclosed in its massive walls. On the further bank of the river rises Villeneuve, picturesque, deserted ; a dead town ; crowned by its magnificent citadel and ancient towers. We think of the picturesque nun ; of the dungeon that contained the Man with the Iron Mask. And we wonder when the nun will come back to the world, and exchange her black veil for a bridal. She is far too pretty and graceful to waste her sweetness on the desert air of a convent.

On this rock we are surrounded by the attractions of Avignon ; that have given it world-wide fame, and which are not of a nature to pass away. The lesser attractions are in the town itself ; ancient houses that spring up here and there in unexpected nooks and corners ; lesser churches, of which many still exist, though less than three hundred bells now clash out upon the air of this "ville sonnante ;" the garden at the back of the Museum, containing a monument to the memory of Petrarch's Laura ; the church of the Cordeliers, which once held her tomb, destroyed with the church itself at the time of the Revolution. It is now the College of St. Joseph, and the youths clattering through the echoing corridor, do not trouble themselves about the loves of Petrarch and Laura.

The day we visited it, men were digging in the quadrangle, on the very spot where Laura's tomb is said to have stood. It is a touching love record, and yet a curious.

Petrarch was born on the 20th July, 1304, at Arezzo, and in his youth studied at Pisa. Then his father migrated to Avignon, where the papal court was now placed. Here Petrarch met with his old professors, whom the civil wars of Italy had exiled. Later on he went to Bologna, where the most celebrated professors of that day were to be found. His studies ended, he visited all the chief towns in Italy. On his return to Bologna he received the news of his

mother's death. Within a year his father died also, unable to survive the loss of his wife.

Petrarch and his brother, now left alone in the world, took up their abode in Avignon : the brother became a monk, Petrarch gave himself up to the study of poetry.

One record declares that he was twenty-two when he first met Laura ; another that he was thirty.

Of Laura also, there are two different accounts. According to one legend, he first beheld her in Avignon, in the church of the Nunnery of St. Claire. Laura was then seventeen. It is said that he never spoke to her ; she never knew his love ; he worshipped her in secret : pouring out his soul in song. This seems a very unsatisfactory way of treating poor Laura. Then she married Hugues de Sade, a commonplace man of commerce, instead of the refined and worshipping poet, had a large family of twelve children, and suffered much from domestic worries. Large families of twelve children were evidently difficult to manage in those days, though probably an easy matter compared with the large families of this advanced age !

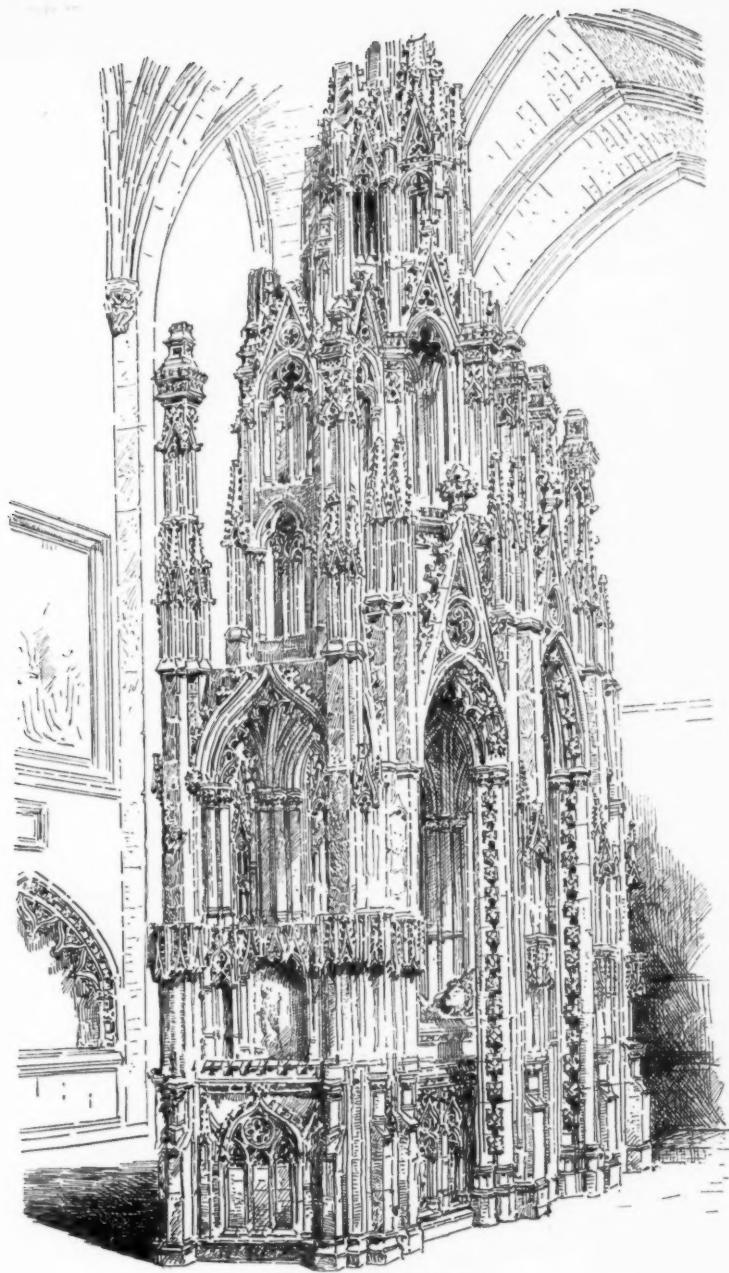
After some years Petrarch travelled through France, Germany and Italy, returning to Avignon with Rienzi. By this time the beauty of Laura was fading under her numerous domestic cares. Still he loved her, and still "he never told his love." Of course having delayed telling his love at the proper time, as an honourable man he could not do so now that she was an appropriated blessing and the mother of a large family. He continued to pour out his soul in song, and if Laura read the sonnets, no doubt she wondered who the other fortunate Laura could be. She probably never recognised herself. We never do recognise ourselves. Self-recognition is said to be the hardest of all lessons.

In 1348 Laura de Sade died, worn out with the burden of life. Petrarch still continued to love and worship her, and write sonnets to her memory.

Such is one unsatisfactory and highly improbable account. We prefer the other tradition, which declares that the Laura of Petrarch's devotion was born, lived and died in Vaucluse. Here he is said to have first seen her, when he was thirty and she was eighteen. The internal evidence of many of Petrarch's sonnets certainly favour this view : and internal evidence is worth more than mere tradition.

Petrarch had withdrawn from the world to the solitude of Vaucluse, attracted by its beauty and charm. He was walking one day in the woods bordering the river, when suddenly this angel in human form appeared before him, amazed his mind, dazzled his vision and captivated his heart for evermore.

According to this tradition Petrarch did tell his love, and completely won the love of his Laura in return. Yet on Petrarch's side it seems to have been too platonic. He never married her ; it was simply a



TOMB OF JOHN XXII.

union of soul and intellect. He contented himself with pouring out all the richness of his emotions in poetry.

A lovely idyll, of course, but again one feels for poor Laura, who was not a poet, and had not that resource to fly to. She appears to have been lovely beyond words, pure, high-souled, ethereal. They wandered in dreams. The trees caught up and treasured the love whispers of the pair, as arm in arm, or with arms gracefully intertwined, they stole through the deserted groves. The birds raved at them, telling them it was spring-time, and lovers should pair and build them a nest. Even the trees murmured reproachfully something of the same sort. It was all in vain. Their ears were closed to the grosser loves of earth. It was a celestial contract.

For some reason, Petrarch seems to have fought against this love. He wished to conquer it; made voyages in the hope of effacing Laura's image from his heart. After all, he must have been of a cold and chilling nature, one would think; it is even said that his affection for his father and mother was not very deep; yet he remained faithful to his divinity to the end; and to the end of his life wrote love-sonnets about her.

Nor did his voyages have the desired effect; her image was never obliterated. Absence only made the heart grow fonder. On the whole, Petrarch must have been a strange contradiction: and one can only forgive him for the sake of the pure and lovely idyll that has come down to posterity.

The end was to come all too soon.

Petrarch was ambassador in Italy when he heard the news of Laura's death. Unable to support the separation, at the age of thirty-two she died of love.

Then of course Petrarch was inconsolable. He left Rome, and returned to Vaucluse, where he lived the life of a hermit; wandering about the woods and streams in search of her. Everywhere her image met him, and yet he found her not. The groves seemed full of the sound of her sweet voice, but when he called aloud upon her name, the silence of the grave answered him. He poured out his soul in poetical requiems. His pen and books were his only companions; to them he whispered his grief; no monk in remote monastic cell was more completely cut off from the world.

This went on for five years, when Petrarch left Vaucluse for Italy, passing his time in poetry and abstruse studies. He did much to cause a revival of philosophy and letters in the fourteenth century.

In 1341 he had been crowned laureate in the Capitol, having received a similar invitation from Paris on the same day, and choosing the former. The University of Paris had just been founded: the prestige of Rome was centuries old: and Petrarch was devoted to his country. He died near Padua in 1374, with the name of Laura on his lips, and the image of Laura in his heart. Nor can we doubt that she was permitted to meet him at the entrance

to the dark valley, where, hand in hand, they passed into the light eternal.

This seems to us a more satisfactory and possible idyll—even though it leave something to be desired. Laura de Sade could not have wandered with him through the amaranthine groves of Elysium, since she belonged to another. And we repeat that the sonnets point far more to a Laura of Vaucluse, than the Laura de Sade. In fact they make the tradition of the latter impossible.

It was to this Vaucluse, haunted by such an atmosphere of poetry and romance that we one day turned our steps, urged thereto by Madame Ville, our hostess of the Hôtel d'Europe.

"Ah, monsieur," she said to us one morning, "you have not been to see our Fontaine de Vaucluse. Are you not going there?"

"Is it worth a visit?" we asked, just for the sake of seeing madame fall into rapture and remonstrance.

"Worth a visit, monsieur!" she echoed with tears in her voice, and as nearly indignant as her gentle nature permitted. "For me there is nothing like it. You may take your Mont Majour and Les Baux, even your Roman antiquities, if you will give me Vaucluse. Then think of Laura and Petrarch: all that wonderful atmosphere of love and romance that has surrounded it for five hundred years and more."

"But, madame, we think Petrarch behaved badly to his Laura. He ought to have married her, and made her an affectionate husband, and not left her to die of disappointed love. Laura died of love for Petrarch, madame. It was unnatural on his part."

"Oh, monsieur, I cannot agree with you," returned Madame Ville in fervent ecstasy. "Think how much grander and more beautiful it all is. Their love was fit for heaven, with nothing gross or earthly about it. It is a great poem; a charming idyll; and takes rank with Dante and Beatrice, and the few pure loves of that description that have been handed down to us from the centuries."

"That is all very well, madame. The fact remains that Laura died of love for Petrarch, and he might have married her, and bade her live for him, and rendered her life a paradise on earth. Of what use all his raving and repentance after she had left him? We cannot forgive him; and if we go to Vaucluse, and we come across his ghost, we shall reproach it."

"I never heard that he appears," smiled madame. "But it is said that on certain anniversaries Laura may be seen at the twilight hour: a tall, graceful woman robed in white, with hands outstretched as though seeking Petrarch, or greeting his approach. Her beautiful eyes shine like stars, and a sweet sad smile hovers about the mouth; and it is said that she has been heard to whisper, 'Petrarch, my beloved!' in the most melodious of tones. I don't know how that may be. For my own part I doubt if ghosts ever talk. I never heard of their doing so."

"Then you believe in ghosts, madame?"

"Oh, monsieur, as I believe in heaven! Why doubt what we know to exist in the other world? Is it so surprising they should sometimes appear in this? The whole weight of evidence is in their favour. To tell me that all we hear is the result of fancy, a diseased imagination, tales made up for the occasion—no, that is impossible."

"Have you ever seen a ghost, madame?"

"Ah, monsieur, I once had a strange, a marvellous experience. I would not tell it to every one, for people would never believe me; and to me the subject is sacred. When I have a spare half-hour, if you like I will tell it you. Whether you accept it or not, you will, I know, receive it *en bonne foi*. But now let me entreat you to visit Vaucluse. Over and above the romance of Petrarch and Laura, the place is charming in itself. You will be delighted."

This advice so corresponded with our own desires that we accepted it without hesitation.

The very next morning after the above ghostly conversation, we started for Vaucluse by an early train. Rich plains surrounded us, watered by many small streams, tributaries of the Rhone and the Durance. It is a flourishing district, rich in vineyards, which produce the famous wine of the country, so prized by Mademoiselle Charlotte. Factories also abound, of silk and wool and paper, and the romantic waters of Vaucluse give them their motive power.

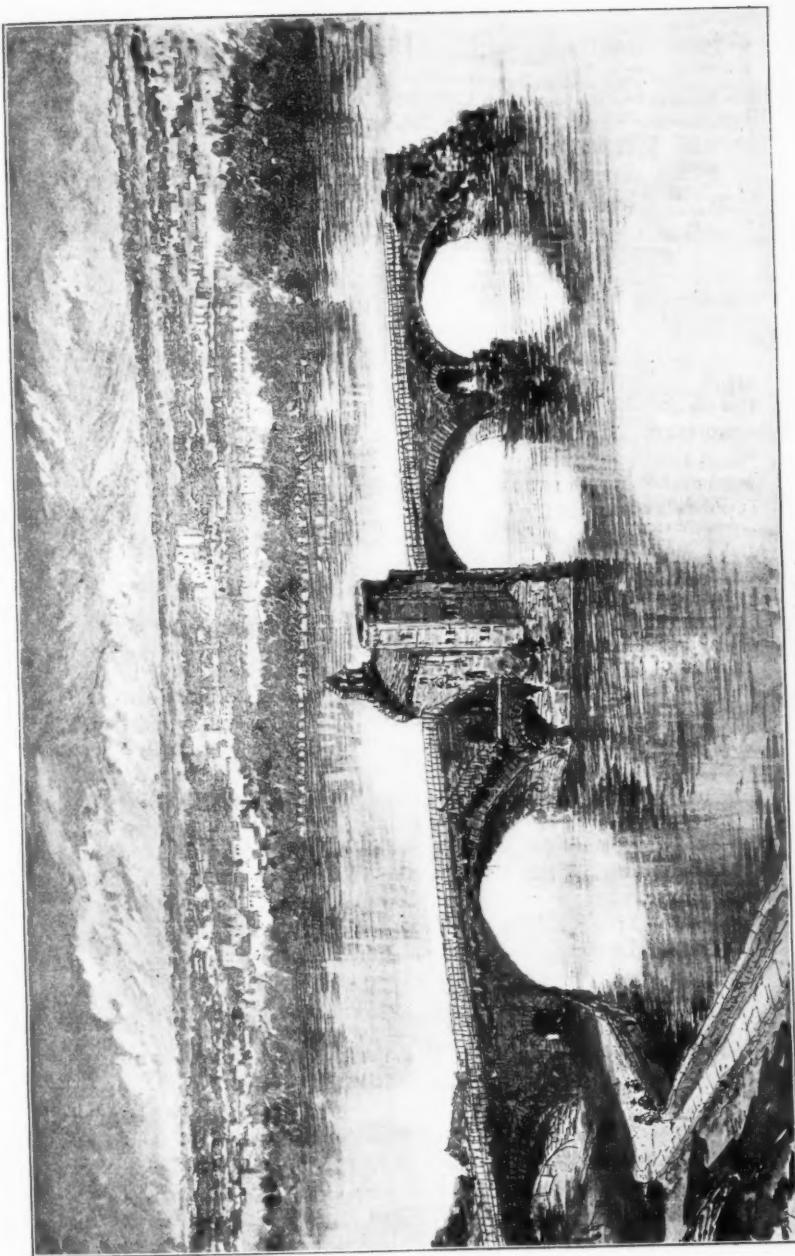
The train soon reached l'Isle sur Sorgues station for Vaucluse. Here an omnibus waited to take us to Petrarch's beloved haunts. Half an hour's pleasant drive brought us to the quaint village. The inn was severely primitive in everything excepting prices. We ordered a modest luncheon to be ready for us later on, and for some trout they charged by weight—its weight in gold. But we saw at once that Vaucluse was very picturesque. Madame had not exaggerated its merits.

The word Vaucluse comes from *Vallis Clusa*—*Vallée Close*—corrupted to Vaucluse. The village possesses wonderful old nooks and corners; houses centuries old, singularly picturesque, and it must be added, shudderingly dirty. The valley is a cul-de-sac, excavated in the side of a mountain. Perpendicular walls rise up on either side; yellow walls, broken and rugged, and bare of verdure, 650 feet high. They are strangely honeycombed, as though giants had once bombarded them with gigantic shells.

The walk from the village to the "fountain" takes about a quarter of an hour, a walk of surpassing interest and charm. You are shut in by these yellow walls. The Sorgues rushes over its torrent bed, filled with great boulders of fallen rock. Its waters are a clear emerald.

The day we visited Vaucluse they were more rapid and abundant than usual. The scene was wild in the extreme. The whole place was haunted by the influence of Petrarch and Laura. We could not

BRIDGE St. BENÉZET.



get away from the impression. High up on the mountain were the ruins of an old castle that belonged to the Bishops of Cavaillon. Here lived Cardinal de Cabassoli, Petrarch's great friend. In imagination we saw him toiling up the steep sides, to confide to the Cardinal his love for Laura, and to read him his last sonnet.

It is a very different scene now from the Vaucluse of Petrarch's day. His beloved woods and groves where he was wont to linger with Laura, have disappeared. Factories and ironworks have established themselves on the banks of the river, but they have not been able to spoil its beauty. The cliffs are said to hold rich prizes for the botanist.

The course of the Sorgues is picturesque and romantic. It froths over its rocky winding bed. The stones are covered with bright green moss, the banks lined with brushwood and tangle. Towards the end of the valley, the water widens; trees overhang the surface; there are boats to take you to the mouth of the mysterious cavern, where the river has its rise. No one has ever sounded the depths within the cavern; none know whence spring the inexhaustible supplies. At times the volume of water is enormous.

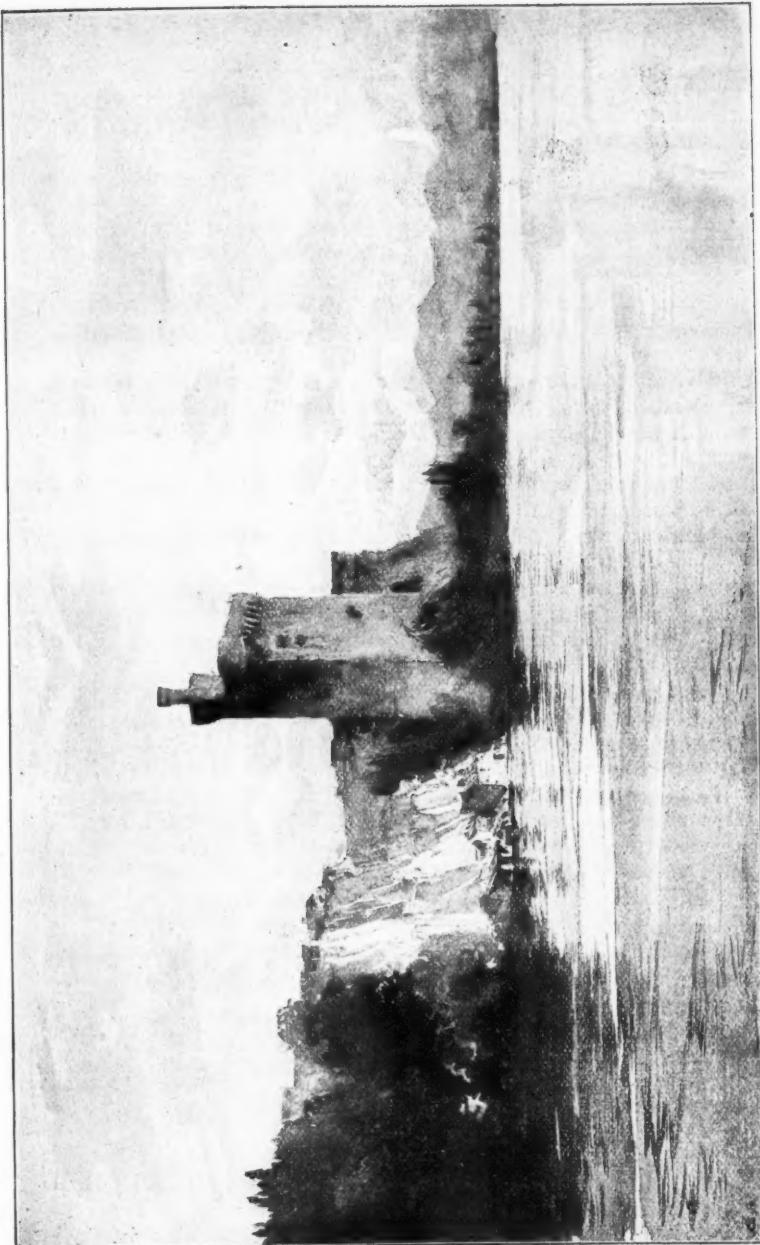
The day of our visit it had risen to a great height; the mouth was entirely covered. Before us rose the end of the cul-de-sac; a yellow perpendicular rock running round in a semicircle, 600 feet high.

We had the whole place to ourselves; nothing disturbed the solitude of the lovely scene. Everything seemed to suggest Petrarch and Laura. These were his beloved haunts. Here for twenty years he retired from the great world, writing his poems and sonnets, enjoying day after day and year after year his freedom and leisure; living, apparently, only to sing the praises of Laura, and feast his platonic gaze upon her matchless beauty.

Returning to the town, and crossing the bridge, we passed under some wonderful old houses perched on the hill-side, and found ourselves on the opposite bank of the torrent. Soon we came to a small house, where Petrarch is said to have lived. Perhaps he never did live there; possibly it only came into existence long after he had rejoined his Laura in the eternal amaranthine groves; but we accepted the statement in good faith.

It was a small, square, picturesque cottage, lying under the shadow of the great rock, overhanging the torrent, whose waters dashed their spray against its walls. There was not a trace of fourteenth-century architecture about the little house, and yet it looked old enough to have seen twice six hundred years. But Petrarch was a great botanist, a passionate lover of flowers and here he may have cultivated his gardens. Trees and creepers overhung the broken walls; trellis-work ran the whole length of the house covered with abundant vines. In the open space in front, men were pressing the grapes. Altogether it was a very picturesque scene.

ANCIENT TOWER, VILLENEUVE.



Out came a wonderful old woman and stood in the porch. She looked as old as the house, and was grandmother and great-grandmother to the two grape-pressers. Intensely interested in the photographs we took, she posed herself and her menkind in what she considered becoming attitudes; and, in return, volunteered to show us the house.

The rooms were small, dark and gloomy; a scent of grape-juice, musty, acrid, seemed everywhere; it was difficult to imagine Petrarch ever putting up with such lodgment. His visits to the castle on the height would have suggested too strong a contrast. The small staircase leading to the upper rooms was old and rickety. It was hard to see what kept the house together.

"We don't know ourselves," said the old woman, in a cracked, high-pitched voice. "Every now and then we hear a crack and a rumbling, and I say there goes the old house at last, but it is always a false alarm. It will last my time, I think. I was born here and here have lived my days, hardly ever sleeping a night away. If it fell to pieces, I should go with it."

"How old are you?" we ventured to ask in fear and trembling, since it is not polite to ask a lady's age.

"Ah, monsieur, I go with the century. On the 1st of January, 1800, I first saw the light. I should like to see the century out, then may as well depart with it. I'm not of much use in the world now."

"But you are still active," we said, for she had skipped up the staircase as if she feared it would give way before reaching the end.

"Yes," she answered. "I still have the use of my legs and arms, and the memory is as good as ever. I remember all about the days of Napoleon, and the commotion of Waterloo. If MM. Erckmann-Chatrian had come to see me when they wrote their book, I could have told them many an anecdote they would not find in any record. I am the grandmother of Vaucluse: ten years older than any other woman in the place. It follows that I must also be the wisest woman, since I have most experience of life."

We ventured to suggest it must have been limited, if she had scarcely ever slept away from her own roof. But she had her own opinion upon the matter.

"It's not travelling that enlarges the mind," she declared, "but thought and reading. I have done a good deal of both in my time, though you would not think so. Whenever the women of the village want advice—and the men, too, sometimes—they come to me and get it: and if they don't follow it they always repent."

"What about Petrarch?" we said, turning the subject lest we should disturb the old lady's good opinion of herself. "Is it possible that he ever lived here?"

"Possible, monsieur? It is certain. He haunts the rooms. I have seen him with my own eyes—in this very room that we are



PRESSING THE GRAPE JUICE, PETRARCH'S HOUSE.

standing in. I have heard him give a long sigh ; several times I am certain he has whispered the name of Laura."

"And has Laura ever appeared ?"

"Never. I have often wished she would come, for I wanted to see how beautiful she was ; but she never has come ; not through all the sixty or seventy years that I have tried to bring her before me. She will never come now. Perhaps I shall go to her."

There was a small vat or tub of wine standing in the room, preparatory to being bottled. In the largeness of her heart, the old woman offered us a red draught, "to drink to her one hundredth birthday ;" but even that bribe was not sufficient ; we felt it prudent to decline.

"Well, monsieur," she said, "if you will not drink to my health, I will drink to yours."

And she dipped a small tumbler into the red liquid, and drained it to the dregs. It might have been after a few such libations that Petrarch appeared to her, sighing and whispering the name of Laura.

"It is excellent wine, monsieur," cried the old woman, with almost a sparkle in her sunken eye. "But for an occasional glass of it, I shouldn't be here now. I always throw into it a certain herb which prolongs life—see how it has prolonged mine. It is a secret handed down to us from my great-grandmother, who lived to be ninety, and my grandmother and mother both lived to be ninety-one. Differently placed I might have made a fortune out of this elixir of life."

"What is the herb, madame ?" we asked. "One would like to profit by your knowledge."

"Ah, monsieur, I cannot tell you. My mother always said, 'Communicate the secret, and the charm will go.' I have never told it to a soul all these years. And yet they say no woman can keep a secret."

"You have proved to the contrary, madame," we said. "Yet if you broke it now you might do some good."

"No, monsieur ; the secret must descend in the female line. What the charm is, I know not. Now I have no daughter ; not even a granddaughter ; all sons and grandsons. So with me the secret must die."

In the little front courtyard the men were still pressing the grapes, filling tubs with the rich red juice. Vines hung over the porch ; creepers drooped from the broken walls ; a long path overshadowed by trees led to the river, where the water rushed and foamed over its rocky bed. On the opposite side rose the honeycombed cliffs. Behind us, far up, was the ancient castle, where Petrarch was always sure of a welcome. It had gone to ruin now, nothing remaining but a few walls and fragments.

But what remained spoke eloquently of Petrarch and the past.

Thus had crumbled and faded the hopes of Laura. Being human, and *not* a poet, she must inevitably have hoped for a closer sweet communion with him who professed such adoration for her pure and beautiful self. Platonic love is all very well, for paradise ; for mere friendship, whether between the same or the opposite sexes : but Laura died of her love for Petrarch.

Oh, Petrarch, cold and cruel, you were unworthy of your Laura. It was she who truly loved and worshipped ; you merely pandered to your poetic vein and fancy. Il y a toujours un qui aime, et un qui se laisse aimer. It is too true.

The men were pressing the grapes, going everlastingly round and round, like a blind donkey at the well.

"Eh, bien, monsieur," said the grandson, as we appeared, "has the old woman been telling you about Petrarch's ghost, and how he appears to her ? I don't believe a word of it; never have believed it. Once she pointed him out to me. 'There he is,' she said, 'up in that corner with a laurel wreath round his head.' As far as I could see, there was absolutely nothing but blank wall. The old grandmother imagined it."

"Shame upon you !" cried the old centenarian. " You know me better than that. As a punishment, I will haunt you when I die."

The grandson made a face of horror which the old woman could not see, but which was so comical that we could but laugh. Fortunately the wine tub overflowed at that moment, and everyone's attention was diverted ; and when all was put right again, we had taken our leave and were on our way back to the inn and luncheon.

Anything more primitive could not be imagined. A deal table ; no cloth ; knives, forks and plates of the roughest description—prices that rivalled the *Café de la Paix* in Paris.

"The next time we visit Vaucluse," said H. C., "we will get Madame Ville to prepare us a small basket of refreshments. Just as the landlord did for us at Tarragona when we went for the day to the ruins of Poblet. We had quite a regal luncheon with our chicken and foie gras and our Laffitte. It was at least a quid pro quo. And how the boy enjoyed his déjeuner—don't you remember ? It was a pleasure to see him eat and drink. But here it is Arles and starvation over again. They give us nothing, served on bare boards ; the wine is worse than vinegar ; and as for the women who wait upon us, they are as ugly as sin—vinegar double distilled—just what Lady Maria would approve of. But really my aunt's ideas and mine don't always agree. You can't expect it, can you ? She is parchment—we are flesh and blood."

We paid the extortionate bill, not without a protest that might as well have been addressed to the rushing torrent, or the ruined castle.

"Il faut payer pour ses plaisirs," said the impertinent woman, who was hideous as a ghoul.

H. C.'s eyes flashed. We trembled. He took up an empty wine-

bottle, and we thought he was about to hurl it at the head of the ghoul, whose moments would have been numbered ; but happily she thought so too, and disappeared through the door like a flash of lightning. We saw her no more, except in nightmare dreams.

Then we went for a last look round. Behind the inn stood the quaint and picturesque village church, dating back to the eleventh century. On these very walls Petrarch and Laura must have gazed many a time. Beside it ran the river ; near it was a mill, and the rushing torrent turned a very picturesque wheel. It was a very charming, old-world nook, and just above us, on the hill side, were some wonderful old-world houses, worthy of the old grandmother in Petrarch's house. The romance was all outward ; internally they must have been fever-dens ; plague-haunted spots.

We stood on the old bridge, looking upwards. The torrent frothed and foamed. Round the angle was Petrarch's house, where the old woman was patiently waiting the end of the century, and the men were pressing the grapes. Here must Petrarch have stood, many a time, making his reflections.

"Here art surpasses nature," he wrote to a friend. "The Sorgues rolls over its emerald bed, transparent as crystal. By its bank I cultivate a little stony and sterile spot, which I have dedicated to the Muses."

Alas, he dedicated his life to those inanimate muses ; he grasped the shadow instead of the substance ; most divine muse of all, the fair Laura, he allowed to sink into the tomb for love of him.

"The jealous nymphs," he continues, "dispute the possession of it with me ; they destroy in the spring the labours of my summer. I had conquered from them a little meadow, and had not enjoyed it long, when upon my return from a journey into Italy, I found they had robbed me of all my possessions. But I was not to be discouraged. I collected the labourers, the fishermen, and the shepherds, and raised a rampart against the nymphs, and there we raised an altar to the muses ; but, alas, experience has proved that it is in vain to battle with the elements. I no longer dispute with the Sorgues a part of its bed ; the nymphs have gained the victory."

But a slight change has come over the scene since those days. Factories have sprung up, the nymphs have had to yield in part. What the hand and skill of Petrarch failed to accomplish, science and machinery have done. The Sorgues still runs, but its waters have been made useful as well as ornamental. With the song of the nymphs mingles the clang and throb of the ironworks. It is more prosy than in his day, hardly less beautiful.

"Here I please myself with my little gardens and my narrow dwelling," he continues in his letter, which rather gives the key to his character. "I want nothing, and look for no favours from fortune. If you come to me you will see a solitary being, who wanders in the meadows, the fields, the forests, and the mountains, resting on the



VAUCLUSE.

mossy grottoes or beneath the shady trees. He passes his days in the most profound calm, happy to have the Muses for his companions, and the song of the birds and the murmur of the stream for his serenade. I have few servants, but many books. Sometimes you will find me seated upon the bank of the river, sometimes stretched upon the yielding grass: and, enviable power, I have all my hours at my own disposal, for it is rarely that I see any one. Above all things, I delight to taste the sweets of leisure."

It was just this luxury of freedom, revelling in his own sweet way and fancies, that Petrarch could not give up, even for Laura. His greatest love of all must have been self. It is sad to think it, but if Laura of Vaucluse and not Laura de Sade was his goddess, it must have been so. Yet he could say after her death: "The world possessed her without knowing her; and I who knew her, remain here below to mourn her loss."

So we all say, when we lose for ever what we have not sufficiently appreciated; the devoted glance and word allowed to pass unrecognised, until a day comes when the silence of death closes the history, and opportunity and possibility have passed away.

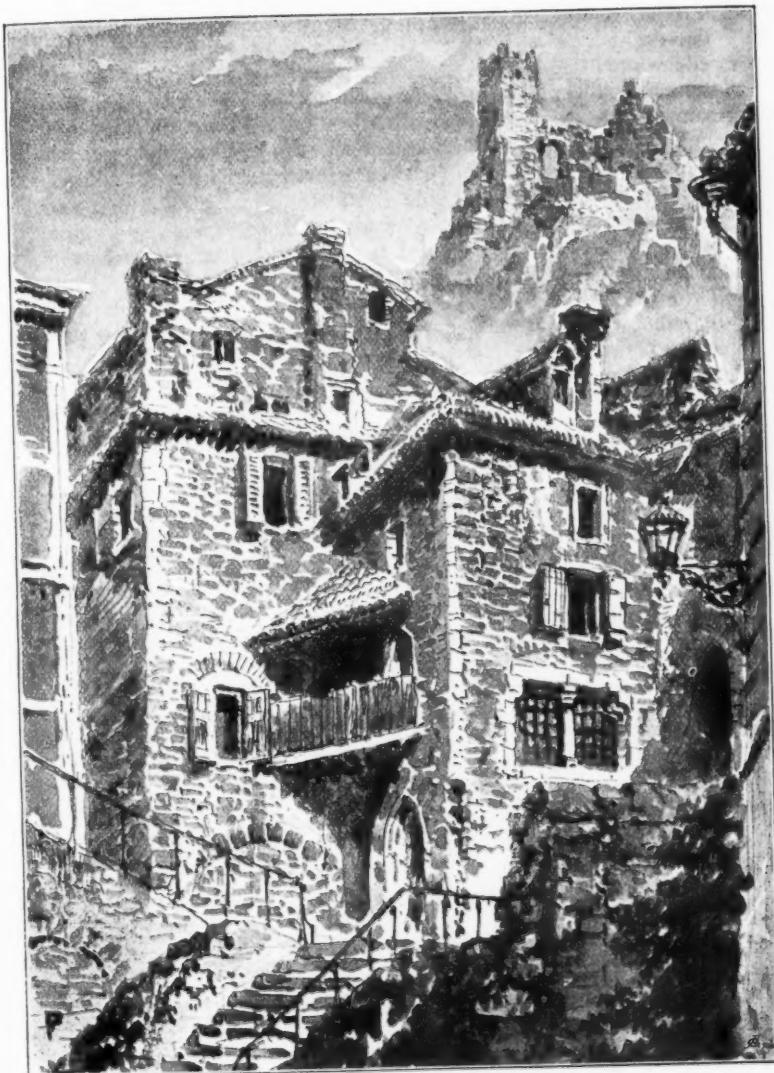
So wept Petrarch perhaps; more faithful and human in his love in death than in life.

We might have lost ourselves in dreams of Petrarch and Laura and the dead centuries, on that bridge, if the omnibus had not come round with as much noise as a gun carriage, and wakened us to realities, the passing time, and the necessity for catching the train back to Avignon. There, most comfortable of inns, most hospitable of welcomes, a refined menu and a well-appointed dinner-table awaited us. To have had to pass the night in this wretched Vaucluse tene-ment, with its hideous declared ghoul and undiscovered vampires would have been, as H. C. said, in mournful melancholy tones, a sorrow's crown of sorrows: Arles out-Heroded. So we gave the scene a last long look, and turned away from it.

We were the only passengers, and travelled in all the state and majesty possible in a two-horse omnibus that tore along at the breathless rate of five miles an hour.

Nevertheless we had time to spare at the little station. They take life easily on the by-lines, far from the maddening crowd. We have breathing time given to us; an interregnum of rest and leisure. If it frets us at the moment, we look back upon it afterwards with a feeling of serene peace and joy. Mind and body are apt to get into a feverish condition, in these days, of wanting to be for ever on the move. It is good to have it checked occasionally, even against our will. The mile-stones do not fly past at express speed, but they are the better remembered.

So for half an hour and more we patrolled the little station and wondered why tarried the train. It was simply that no other train depended upon its punctuality; and station-master and guards,



OLD HOUSES, VAUCLUSE.

porters and drivers had to exchange their little chronicles. But even these must come to an end, and the train puffed up at last, very quietly and leisurely. After waiting about ten minutes whilst the officials delivered their civilities to each other, we puffed off again.

The declining sun gilded the rich plains of Vaucluse. It is indeed a well-favoured department, from every point of view : rich in scenery, in the manifold fruits of the earth, in historical events, antiquities and remains ; rich in a romantic atmosphere that has grown up and around it since the days of Petrarch and Laura, and in many a century that rolled away before they lived and loved and suffered. Above all, rich in that broad and noble river, which here goes rapidly but expiringly towards the sea ; a river we would not exchange for the Rhine, and which is only equalled in interest and splendour by the Danube.

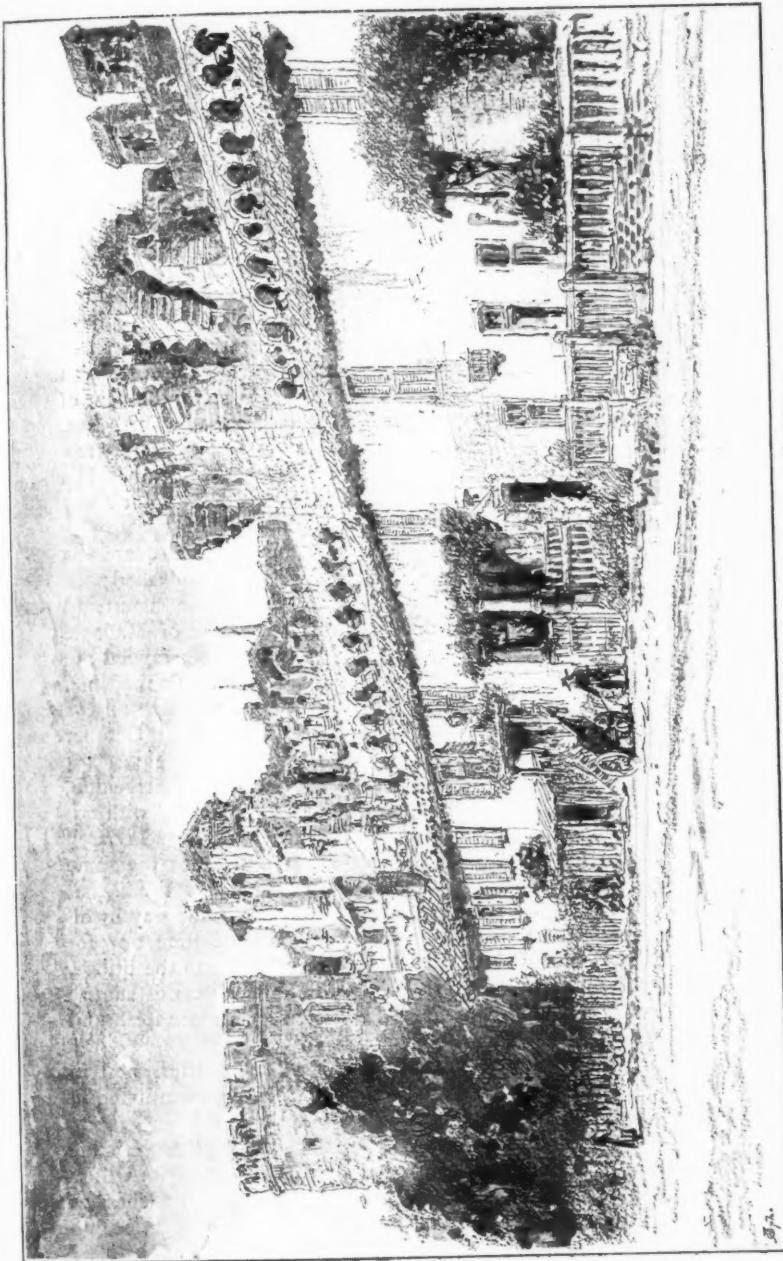
Through these rich plains, now mellow with autumn tints and bare from harvests gathered in, the train leisurely rolled on. We had time for noting every detail and admiring all the rich colouring of the changing foliage. Hills bounded the distance ; there the Cévennes, yonder the Alpine range ; Ventoux, Petrarch's favourite mountain, which he was wont to climb and where he wandered in poetic solitude, standing out majestically against the paling sky. In his day it was covered with forests of pines and birches, but not a tree remains. For ten months of the year it is snow-capped, and to-day as the sun declined it reflected a flush of delicate blue and rose colour, which lighted up all its crevasses and rugged, wave-like surface.

Then came the welcome outlines of Avignon : the towering heights of the palace of the popes confronted by the equally formidable rock-fortress of St. André and the slopes of Villeneuve.

It was pleasant to get back to the familiar streets ; the quaint and ancient Place Crillon, where stands the hospitable Hôtel d'Europe. Here again we are on classic and historical ground.

So recently as 1815—that disturbed and momentous period of the century—it was the scene of a terrible murder.

The Peninsular War was a thing of the past. Spain was settling down. St. Sebastian was slowly recovering from ruin and pillage. Fontarabia and Irún and Biarritz, the woods and hills and slopes of all the surrounding country had returned to the normal condition, save and except the ruined towns and houses that are not so quickly repaired as nature's ravages. The thousands of fallen soldiers of all nations, had bleached unburied in the sun, had been devoured by wolves and vultures, and other birds and beasts of prey. The sound of the cannonading was stilled, the smoke of the guns had vanished from those plains for ever. Wellington had passed to other conquests. Waterloo had just been fought. The whole of France was shaken, petrified with the news. Fortune had at length turned for "le petit Caporal," who had robbed France of her best blood, the



COTTAGES ATTACHED TO THE OLD WALLS OF AVIGNON.

youth and flower of her population, yet who had been forgiven so long as his sword conquered. And now the tide had turned ; the evil day had dawned ; the youth and flower of the country had been sacrificed in vain ; the old father would go down to the grave unsupported by the strong arm of the son ; many a maiden must pass through life unwedded.

In Provence there were mobs of hot-blooded royalists, who turned with fury against the very name of Napoleon and went about committing every species of ravage.

Marshal Brune was passing through Avignon, armed with Lord Exmouth's passport. A passport from the pope himself would have been no safeguard against the fury of the mob. His carriage had passed through the old gateway near the Hôtel d'Europe—even then a well-known and flourishing hostelry. He heard the roar of the mob in the square, and put out his head to see what it meant. They caught sight of him, stopped the carriage, and in a very few minutes the marshal had been barbarously put to death. His requiem was the cry of these wild demons, who went on their way seeking further prey and plunder.

Very different was the quiet scene this evening. The square was deserted ; calm and serene was the blue sky overhead, flushed with tints of sunset ; quiet and picturesque was the vine-trellised courtyard of the hotel ; gentle and amiable and earnest the face of Madame Ville looking through the window of her bureau. She wrapped her shawl closer round her as she came forward to greet us. To madame, however fine and warm the weather, it was the autumn of the year, and a shawl over the shoulders was as necessary as an October fire to an Englishman.

"Eh, bien, messieurs," she cried in her quiet tones that seldom rose much above a murmur : "I see you have been pleased with our Fontaine de Vaucluse. You have breathed the same air as Petrarch and Laura, gazed upon the same scenes ; and no doubt the same thoughts have passed through your minds. I always think that Nature has a language of her own, interpreted in the same way by all who are in touch with her. As I cannot spare the time now for many excursions, I keep in tune with Nature by going to the bridge, and watching the flowing of the river, the wonderful effects of sunrise and sunset. Each time I go down the scene seems more fresh and beautiful and heavenly than before."

We declared ourselves on madame's side in these matters, and in touching upon Vaucluse mentioned the singular old woman living in Petrarch's house.

"Poor Jeanne Bartellet," laughed Madame Ville. "A veritable curiosity, monsieur, but not a bad sort of woman. She is a little rough and rude, perhaps, but by no means ignorant. And she has led a very blameless life. A centenarian, and only a dried up mummy now, shrivelled and ugly—but what shall we be at her age ?

There is something glorious in living one hundred years. Either they have led very good lives and heaven has kept them, or they have led very bad ones, and the devil has looked after them. One or the other. Jeanne has been a good woman. Her secret talisman?—the herb she throws into the wine? Monsieur, I have my doubts about it. Certainly she believes what she says; if she deceives she is deceived herself; but in my own opinion it is all fancy. She and her mother and her grandmother are a tough tribe; they would all have lived their age without the help of the talisman. It does not make centenarians of her neighbours, however much they may drink the charmed wine. Old age runs in families, like the gout; like goodness in some, no matter where they are, and badness in others, no matter what they do."

Dinner was presently announced. It was a pleasure to enter the well-appointed *salle-à-manger*, with its numerous small tables and spotless linen, all well but softly lighted up. Nothing jarred or was aggressive over which Madame Ville had any control.

She had placed upon our table a bottle of her best Châteauneuf des Papes, and excellent and reviving it was after our day's hard labours. It is a choice wine of the country. The village lies to the north of Avignon. The old château was a favourite resort of the popes, and before them of the Templars. St. Louis may have come here with his gorgeous train, himself most simple and most ascetic of all: and whilst his courtiers quaffed the Châteauneuf, till the red wine flushed the brow and sparkled the eye, Louis drank water and kept firm control over that calm reason and reflection, that close communion with the unseen, for which he was pre-eminent.

But all great things seem doomed, sooner or later. There came a wicked Baron des Adrets who set fire to the historic château from pure wanton love of wickedness and destruction, and nothing remains of it to crown the hill but one solitary, moss-grown tower.

Warmed and invigorated and exhilarated by madame's generous Châteauneuf, by a menu admirably dressed and served, we presently wandered out to our favourite spot, the bridge spanning the Rhone.

A clearer, more glorious night had never been. There was a crispness in the air unspeakably refreshing. The sun had set some time, but in the west, beyond Villeneuve and the Fort of St. André, there lingered a faint and exquisite afterglow. The moon had risen behind the palace of the popes, which stood out in weird, wonderful and mysterious outlines, its battlemented towers and walls distinctly visible. Where the moon did not penetrate all was profound gloom and darkness, but only the more effective for that reason. Beneath us rolled the broad waters of this matchless river—we never tire of singing its praises; of heaping up adjectives of the superlative degree; of enforcing its charms upon the reader by reiteration amounting to importunity.

Never had we thought it more beautiful and impressive than

to-night. Day by day the waters were increasing in volume and rapidity. To-night they flowed through the arches with a rushing, surging sound delightful to listen to.

Again the moon threw her jewelled pathway from bank to bank. The myriad jewels flashed and sparkled and danced, and the rushing waters swallowed them up and carried them away to the sirens in the deeper waters of the Mediterranean. Villeneuve and St. André slept in the pale silvery moonlight. Our picturesque nun was probably sleeping the sleep of the just; not dreaming of history and the man with the iron mask, but of a day when she would go back to the world; and of a lover who disappointed her not; and of a ceremony where nothing black and sombre would be permitted.

It was altogether a magic scene, giving rise to a crowd of thoughts and incidents. The great days of the Popes of Avignon; the beauty of Joanna before which all men bowed; the gorgeous pageants of which this river had been the arena; the rise of Avignon to splendour and its downfall to insignificance; a name to conjure with, but no longer a power in the world.

We seemed steeped in romance and magic as we stood there whilst the hours chimed and gazed down upon the rushing waters; and upwards at the illuminated outlines of fort and palace; and yet higher at the dark sapphire sky where the moon rode in silent majesty and the stars followed in her train.

And we asked ourselves where else we could equal all the beauties, all the historical and antiquarian interests that abound in this matchless and marvellous and far-reaching Valley of the Rhone.



KISSING KITTY.

EMMELINE and Adelaide burst into the drawing-room together.
"Mother, it's too much——"

"You'll never believe——"

"Only I saw it——"

"And I didn't happen to be looking at the moment, but I had noticed how very close——"

"Something must be done."

"You must speak to her, mother."

"If those are Ceylon manners——"

"How he must despise her! It's a pity she can't know that!"

Mrs. Lushington succeeded in making herself heard.

"Really, girls, I don't know about Ceylon, but Lilac Lodge manners have certainly undergone deterioration. One at a time, if you please. Emmeline, you seem to have seen something. May I ask what?"

"Mr. Fox——" Maiden modesty dictated a pause and a struggle.

"Well?"

"Kissing Kitty."

"Nonsense, nonsense!" said Mrs. Lushington sharply.

"Mother, I saw."

"I can't think it—of Mr. Fox. Wasn't he walking round the garden with Gladys and Imogen?"

"Yes, but Kitty joined them; and she said it hurt her hand where she scratched it yesterday to hold up her parasol, and Mr. Fox took it and held it over her, so Gladys and Imogen went into the orchard. They told me and Adelaide, and I thought you wouldn't like it; I said to Adelaide we'd better keep together, but as we got near the summer-house we saw them——"

"Kitty was leaning back against the rustic table, and Mr. Fox was standing with his back to the garden."

"Very near her, and then——"

"Are you sure?"

"Oh, yes! You know how tall he is. He bent all the way down and—— It's excessively unpleasant having a girl like that for one's cousin."

"It reflects on us."

"Where are they now?" said Mrs. Lushington.

At this moment a tall good-looking young man, who was obviously an Anglican curate, entered the drawing-room through the open French window. He was alone. Smiling delightfully, he informed Mrs. Lushington that the charms of her garden had seduced him into prolonging his call in a most unconscionable way, and then with

tender hand-shakes all round he took his leave. True to her womanly instincts, Mrs. Lushington had no wrath to spare for the male offender. She preserved her usual motherly friendliness of manner with Fox, and, as soon as he was gone, told her daughters to send Kitty to her at once.

Mrs. Lushington, a widow, on means which were moderate but sufficient, supported in a suburban town the position of mother to six spinster daughters between the ages of twenty-three and thirty-two with considerable dignity.

She said she did not blame the women who made a task of getting their daughters married. She pitied them. But she thanked Heaven that as her dear ones would always have enough to keep up a modest joint establishment, and were fondly attached to one another, she was spared the necessity of turning man-hunter in their behalf. She and her daughters could enjoy pleasant society without ulterior views. Constantia, Mabel, Emmeline, Adelaide, Gladys, and Imogen had been brought up in such a manner that if matrimony were to be their lot they would make treasures of wives ; if, on the contrary, they preferred to remain unmarried their intellectual resources and charming dispositions would render them bright examples of the possibility of finding perfect contentment in single life.

These speeches were very comfortable and cheering to hear for the marriageable men whom Mrs. Lushington spent a fifth part of her income in entertaining at Lilac Lodge. And whether from a feeling that models of delightedness in the virgin state were so rare as to render the thought of breaking into Mrs. Lushington's complete half-dozen of specimens almost a criminal one ; or whether from the fact that the Misses Lushington, though presentable, agreeable girls enough, had neither special graces nor money down—whether from either of these causes or mere chance, certain it is that Imogen, the youngest girl, had now been out five years, and not one among the sisters had ever really known what it was to be proposed to, even by an ineligible suitor.

Mrs. Lushington put a brave face upon it. She told her friends that sometimes she was tempted to regret her daughters being so fastidious.

The parish had for a long while been subject to the ministrations of a married vicar and a curate who was engaged to his cousin.

Almost simultaneously the vicar died, and the curate obtained a distant living. They were succeeded by the Rev. Joseph Fox, a bachelor and a horrid flirt, curate ; and the Rev. James Croby, a grave widower of forty, with two little girls, vicar.

Mrs. Lushington, having always been devoted to the clergy from principle, felt joyfully free to make much of both gentlemen without giving ground for unpleasant remarks.

Young men who flirt systematically are objectionable, but there is the consoling reflection that with very, very few exceptions they end by some one marrying them ; and occasionally they end when they least expect it, which no doubt serves them right.

So Mrs. Lushington discovered much that she could like in Mr. Fox, in spite of his regrettable propensity. She would not by any means advise all mothers to allow of his constantly seeking the company of their daughters, but *her* girls were not over-impressionable or the least flighty, etc., etc. Tennis-parties, river-picnics, little suppers, were laid on more frequently than usual that summer, and Mr. Fox was quite willing to grace the Lilac Lodge entertainments whenever he had not a better invitation.

Mrs. Lushington, of course, never planned. But some suitabilities must strike even a careless eye. Mr. Croby was a frankly middle-aged man of sober, nay, somewhat formal manners ; he did not go in for chaff and smart girls ; he had been a widower six years ; his daughters were eight and nine ; and he must begin to feel how much it was his duty to select for them with the utmost care a second mother. With it all, he was a remarkably handsome man.

Constantia (I beg her pardon for twice alluding to the fact) was thirty-two. Not too old for a wife, and not too young for a step-mother. She had a dignified presence, dressed well, kept house (as Mrs. Lushington casually informed Mr. Croby) at Lilac Lodge, and, to crown all, was superintendent of the girls' Sunday-school.

Mrs. Lushington was probably the only person in the parish who had not said aloud, at one time or another, that as Mr. Croby was very well off he really could not do better than marry Constantia.

The man was provokingly rigid and reserved. However, there were indications. He talked to Constantia a good deal (for him) on parish matters. Mrs. Lushington was too wise to think much of that. But three days ago he had brought to Lilac Lodge a decorator's book of wall-papers, and deliberately asked the opinion of Constantia and her mother, as to which paper would be most suitable for the drawing-room and the little room opening out of it at the Vicarage.

Mrs. Lushington was sure that it was only the excessive caution natural to his years and temperament which led him to include her in the request. With a daring which was almost genius, she had made a point of differing markedly from Constantia. And her daughter's choice in wall-paper had been Mr. Croby's.

Now, while Mrs. Lushington, erect, with bent brow, sat awaiting the entrance of the delinquent Kitty, the door was thrown open by the well-trained parlour-maid, and Mr. Croby was announced.

He was received affectionately and respectfully, but without any fuss. He forthwith informed Mrs. Lushington that he had only looked in to ask for an address. The address was furnished ; those darlings, Lotty and Totty Croby, were inquired after ; and the Vicar had risen from his chair when Mrs. Lushington, reflecting that in five minutes Constantia and Mabel would be back from their nursing lecture, and knowing that it would be hopeless to try and detain the man of few words with mere chat—reviewing in a moment the whole position—Mrs. Lushington, I say, was tempted to sacrifice

Kitty in the good cause, and with clasped hands and uplifted eyes she exclaimed :

"Oh, Mr. Croby, I am in such a difficulty. If you *could* spare a little time, I should be deeply grateful for your advice—your pastoral advice. May I presume so far? I have no one else to consult. I would not for the world mention the matter to any one who might repeat it."

Croby, as in duty bound, sat down again. Mrs. Lushington rushed headlong into her tale.

"I don't think you've happened to see a little niece of mine who's staying with us—Kitty Merton."

No—Mr. Croby didn't think he had.

"She has come over from Ceylon to study singing at the Alexandra College. She is my half-brother's daughter; he has a position out there—something connected with the Customs. I promised I would ask her down for her month's holiday in August. I was very glad to do it, I am *sure*; but the little girl turns out to be quite a charge. Owing—"Mrs. Lushington spoke with particular slowness and earnestness—"owing to her having grown up without a mother's care, she is not at all what one would wish. She has sadly reckless ways, young as she is. She has seen a good deal of company in Ceylon—men's company especially—and her behaviour—I don't want to be hard, but it has been a real trial to me. It is so difficult to know at what point to interfere. This afternoon things came to a climax. A young man who has been in the habit of visiting here a good deal in a quiet friendly way—I don't wish to mention his name—was taken by Kitty into the summer-house, and there—I am shocked and grieved to have to say it—my poor little niece *let him kiss her.*"

Croby put up his left hand, and appeared anxious to smudge out the lower part of his face with it. The gesture, being a favourite one with him, afforded no clue as to the state of his feelings.

"Isn't it distressing?" Mrs. Lushington inquired.

"How old is she?" said Croby.

"Barely seventeen."

"How did you come to know of it?"

Mrs. Lushington explained, adding that her girls could not help seeing the occurrence, and only spoke of it for the sake of their cousin.

"The young ladies may have been mistaken."

"I don't think so. The thought of such a thing being possible as an incident would be so far from my girls' minds."

"The fellow may have serious intentions."

"Highly unlikely."

"Highly idiotic, considering your niece's extreme youth; but——"

"I am convinced it is nothing of the kind. Silly flirtation on both sides and a deplorable want of self-respect on Kitty's—that is the whole explanation, I feel sure. Now pray advise me. Shall I send Kitty straight back to her college?"

"I wouldn't do that," said Croby, with some indulgence in his tone.

"What would you do? Having always had to deal with girls of such a very different stamp, I must confess to feeling totally at a loss."

"I would give the girl a scolding and the young man the cold shoulder. I would see they didn't have any more *tête-à-tête* meetings. And look here—let Miss Kitty take the youngest class in the girls' Sunday-school. Miss Pike is away for a fortnight, and I know Miss Constantia was puzzled to find a substitute."

While provisionally enveloping her oracle in a sweet gaze of rapt acquiescence Mrs. Lushington pondered this last proposition. Well, it could do no harm. The boys' school was Fox's realm. In the other one Croby and Constantia held joint sway.

"Oh, what a kind, wise thought!" she cried in a few moments. "I trust it may have a beneficial effect."

"Something to think about besides these follies," said Croby, relapsing into taciturnity.

Kitty came in. Mr. Croby considered her with some interest. He saw a short girl with a mignon figure in a badly-made white muslin frock. He saw a little face which contrived to be both gay and pathetic. He saw large sparkling dark eyes, rose-tinted and dimpled cheeks, a great quantity of chestnut hair, an insignificant nose. He saw a red, fresh, saucy, cherub, cherry-and-baby mouth only too likely to put into the head of any man who got the chance the idea of—yes—kissing Kitty.

"Mr. Croby, this is my niece, Kitty Merton," said Mrs. Lushington gloomily.

Croby put out his hand. Kitty's mite of a hand dropped into it comfortably. Croby's handsome face and staid airs did not alarm her.

"Isn't it hot?" she said, smiling just as if he had been any other man.

Croby said "Yes," and then he made Kitty acquainted with the fact that her services were needed in the girls' Sunday-school. Kitty, who adored children, was charmed.

"But what shall I say to them?" she inquired anxiously.

"Miss Constantia will enlighten you as to your duties," said Croby, stiff but not stern. "Follow her directions, and you will be all right. The same remark would apply all along the line—through life," he added, with a vague idea of paternally sermonising this dark-eyed young lady.

Mrs. Lushington's feelings were almost too much for her. A compliment from Mr. Croby stood against the like from other men as a hundred to one. The mother, with an unintelligible excuse, swept from the room. She thought Constantia and Mabel must have come in.

"We use Andrew Steel's books," said Croby, solemnly surveying Kitty; "and this quarter we are in *Chronicles*."

Kitty did not quite know how to reply. On such occasions she had a trick—she could not help it; I believe it was atavism—a trick of dropping her head back the least bit in the world and getting her long upper and under eyelashes mixed up together, and somehow when she did it her face became adorable. She did it now.

What Mr. Croby did was to drop his hat—a wideawake.

Kitty stooped with the prettiest eagerness imaginable to pick it up. Mr. Croby stooped too. The result was a collision, from which Kitty surged up, swallowing a laugh; but Croby looked queer and red.

Mrs. Lushington returned. Constantia and Mabel were still out, and the vicar now hurriedly and decidedly made his farewells; but this little disappointment could not affect Mrs. Lushington's spirits. Such was their exaltation that she only turned to attack Kitty from a sense of duty. Fox—Kitty. A dangling curate—a silly, vulgar little girl. Pooh! it seemed hardly worth being angry about. Still, she was responsible to her brother for Kitty's behaviour while the child continued under her roof; so, successfully reassuming the frowns which Mr. Croby had dispersed, she said:

"Kitty, I find myself obliged to ask you on what terms you are with Mr. Fox."

Kitty stared.

"Terms? What do you mean, Aunt Marion? No terms. Of course, we're just like any other two people. I think he's rather jolly."

Enough of skirmishing. Mrs. Lushington charged with all her cavalry.

"You and Mr. Fox were seen in the summer-house," she said abruptly.

Kitty's lines did not waver.

"Why not?" she said.

"Really, Kitty, I have a blush for you if you have none." This was figurative, for Mrs. Lushington's ample cheeks retained unaltered their usual healthy brickdust colour. "You were seen to encourage—to permit—to let Mr. Fox kiss you." As she pronounced the last words Mrs. Lushington's voice sank to a steely whisper.

"I didn't—he didn't!" exclaimed Kitty quite loud. She could not have denied the fact more vehemently; but there were signs about her of a tendency in the direction of thinking the whole thing rather funny which ruffled Mrs. Lushington.

"It was seen, Kitty—it was witnessed. You were leaning against the rustic table, and he——"

"Oh! Aunt Marion, yes. I'll tell you. We were talking about things, and all at once Mr. Fox said: 'Miss Merton, there's a greenfly on your cheek near the corner of your mouth.' I hate greenflies. I have a simple horror of them. I couldn't touch one with my own hand on any account; so I said: 'Mercy! blow it off.' And he blew it off—a little greenfly, Aunt Marion."

"Am I to believe you, Kitty?"

"Ask Mr. Fox."

Mrs. Lushington sat silent a while. Then she said very coldly:

"I accept your explanation. But no nice girl would suggest to a gentleman the removal of an insect from her face by the means which you yourself own you invited Mr. Fox to employ. No wonder it looked like—something else. Kitty, this gives me an opportunity for telling you what has been for some time on my mind—that is, that your ways with gentlemen are objectionably forward, and not what I can approve or countenance. During the remainder of your visit, I shall get up no more parties at home; and, if you are invited out, I intend to say what I consider the truth—that you are too young and unformed for society. And I hope, Kitty, that my thinking it right to adopt this measure will impress you, and that, if you come to us again next year, I shall have the satisfaction of chaperoning a niece who has learnt to conduct herself like my own daughters—in fact, like a gentlewoman."

Kitty's gipsy eyes filled with tears. It was not at the prospect of the penance invented for her, but the joyful-hearted, careless, innocent romp felt for the first time in her life a strange, stinging, inward hurt. The child suffered in a way which she herself did not understand. Perhaps it was as well.

Constantia and Mabel were heard in the hall. Mrs. Lushington hurried out to them: and Kitty went to her own room, and sat and wept upon her bed. Mrs. Lushington, seeing the little rose-tinted face present itself, spoiled and swelled, at the dinner-table, felt content.

Peaceful days followed. Mr. Fox had gone to stay with his mother. Mrs. Lushington kept her word about the Lilac Lodge gaieties; it suited very well in all respects that there should be a lull. Mr. Croby, it had been discovered, rather disliked general company which was also genteel; the people who invited him least often in that sort of way pleased best. Appearances continued to promise charmingly. The only thing was that Mrs. Lushington got a little tired of promise without performance, and was obliged to draw patience from constant contemplation of the undoubted truth that when a man is forty he rather walks than rushes into matrimony, as a rule. The vicar's walk was a slow one. But she well knew that any efforts towards getting the creature to mend its pace would be liable to result in a halt, or, worse still, retrograde movement.

Kitty did well with her little girls on Sundays. Constantia condescended to praise her. Mr. Croby's own daughters, Lotty and Totty, were members of her class. They took a great fancy to Miss Merton, and several times the girl was begged by her little friends to come over to the Vicarage for tea and games in the schoolroom. These artless invitations were the only ones Kitty was allowed to accept. Mrs. Lushington thought she had good reason to be content

with the success of her plan. Certainly her giddy niece seemed to grow every day graver, softer, more silent. The younger girls smiled when their mother remarked the change with satisfaction ; they said that Kitty was missing Mr. Fox.

Two days before the date of the little singing-student's departure for her college, a great out-door entertainment, connected with a local charity, took place in the neighbourhood. Mrs. Lushington squeezed out the money for five tickets, and appeared on the ground at the head of her four eldest daughters.

It was in the refreshment tent that Mabel came up to her mother.

"I want to speak to you," she murmured while pretending to smooth Mrs. Lushington's fichu.

"You feel the heat, Mabel dearest ?" said Mrs. Lushington, elaborately elevating her voice. The vicar was giving Constantia tea. The tent was nearly empty. "Take my arm, and come outside. Well, what is it, Mabel?"

"Mother, Mr. Fox came back yesterday."

This young man's movements formed incomparably the most interesting section of contemporaneous history in the eyes of the majority of the unmarried women in the parish under the age of— I decline to risk a figure. In all his goings-out and comings-in he was watched, chronicled, discussed.

"Did he ?" said Mrs. Lushington smoothly. Even with her own daughters she never forsook the character she had arranged for herself. "I hope he left his mother better."

"He got here early," said Mabel, "and he asked Adelaide if Kitty wasn't coming. Then he went away, and Henny Smith, who has only just arrived, says she saw him going in at our gate as they drove by."

"Gladys and Imogen are there. Young men don't care much for this sort of thing. I daresay he went off to try and get some tennis. They would make a four—with Kitty."

"But Gladys and Imogen were going over to L—— to shop, and Kitty said she shouldn't go, because she had spent all her money."

Mrs. Lushington meditated.

"I meant to go home after Mr. Croby had made his speech," she said in a few moments. "I have asked Mrs. Smith to take my place with all of you. I cannot alter my plans. I would not miss our dear Mr. Croby's speech for any consideration. It is the next thing on the programme. Besides, if, after all the pains I have taken with her, Kitty falls back into behaving undesirably, it will simply show that, for the sake of Gladys and Imogen, she must not be invited here again."

A friend offered to take Mrs. Lushington home in her carriage. Sore-footed with standing, she could not refuse. Consequently, it was more than an hour since Mr. Croby had finished his short speech, and, in fact, left the grounds, when Mrs. Lushington at last found

herself sunk among cushions and bowling in the direction of Lilac Lodge.

Her first question to the parlour-maid on arriving, was : "Are Miss Gladys and Miss Imogen still out?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Has any one called?"

"Yes, ma'am. Mr. Fox. He asked for the young ladies, and as he stood at the door Miss Merton ran down, so he came in."

"Is he here now?"

"I think so, ma'am. They went into the garden."

In a sequestered nook of the Lilac Lodge garden there stood a swing. Mrs. Lushington, going out upon the deserted tennis-court, and casting keen eyes round her, soon perceived away at the distant swing a gleam of white, a blot of black. A lady has a right to walk where she pleases and as noiselessly as she pleases in her own garden. Mrs. Lushington crept along the shrubbery which led to the swing-corner. At a convenient distance she stood still, a screen of yew-bushes in front of her, and stooping slightly, peeped between the boughs.

Kitty was in the swing. It was not moving. The little white muslin frock, and sailor hat, and pretty piquant face, and big coils of chestnut hair were quite still. A man in the completest and correctest of clerical garb stood behind the girl, and held the swing firm. But it was not Mr. Fox the philanderer. It was Mr. Croby the austere—kissing Kitty.

Whether her own limbs or some miraculous power conveyed her back to the house, Mrs. Lushington never knew. Five minutes later she had sunk upon the drawing-room sofa, and if I could think of any simile calculated to throw light on her frame of mind I would adorn my page with it at once, but my humble style is not equal to the opportunity offered; I must therefore leave Mrs. Lushington's condition to the fancy of the reader and pass on, merely explaining meanwhile that there was a side-door in the garden-wall at Lilac Lodge, often used by familiar visitors. Through that door the curate, finding Kitty bored and absent in his company, had gone almost straight out; and by the same entrance the vicar, an hour later, had come in.

Before long Kitty showed herself in the drawing-room. Mrs. Lushington had had time to recover a certain amount of calm. "Kitty!" She rose (she was a fine tall woman) and towered over the hapless maid. "Just now I happened to go into the shrubbery."

"Did you, Aunt Marion?"

"I did. I saw you in the swing. I saw Mr. Croby." Sublime with scorn—"Was it a greenfly this time?"

Down dropped the head.

"No," whispered Kitty.

The head was raised again. Sweet fire flew over the face.

"He'd have come in to speak to you," said Kitty softly, "but we didn't think you were at home. He's gone to write to papa. We're engaged."

* * * * *

Men chuckled. "Croby's a rogue," they said. "Who'd have thought of his picking himself such a rosebud?"

But any one seeing Kitty and Lotty huddled together in a certain great old chimney-corner chair at the Vicarage, and the vicar with his arm behind them and the severe lines breaking up all over his face in blissful confusion—any one, seeing this sight, would have felt inclined to agree with Mrs. Lushington, when she raised her eyes to the ceiling and cried: "Don't say anything to me, my dear Mrs. Smith, against the engagement. I am delighted with it."

She insisted that the wedding should take place from Lilac Lodge. Such heroism deserved and met with some reward. The wealthy head of a tea-growing establishment, coming over from Ceylon with Kitty's father, and meaning to buy a place in England, was invited to the wedding. He fell a victim to the charms of Gladys Lushington who looked particularly well in her bridesmaid's frock.

"It's an excellent match," said Mrs. Lushington, sighing, "but you mustn't think me selfish, my dear Mrs. Smith, if I feel a little sad over it, for when once this sort of thing begins in a family——"

She sighed again, and slowly shook her head. Constantia was disappointed; but it was with a cool, temperate, intellectual disappointment, the disappointment of a diplomatist defeated at a congress. She did not love the vicar. And Kitty—ah, lucky vicar! —Kitty did.



THE PHYSIOLOGIST'S NOTE-BOOK.

FOUR of us were sitting in the bay-window of the hotel. There was England, the landscape painter; Harrison, the civil engineer; Eardley Britton, the professor of physiology; and myself.

Outside, there was a whisk of rain in the air. The surf was coming up thunderously on the beach, fifty yards away. Dusk had fallen very rapidly, and far out at sea the lightship's challenge flashed at regular intervals. We lit our pipes. Politics had been discussed; books talked over, and nothing remained but the last refuge of the weary—story-telling.

Harrison tried to thrill us with a profoundly uninteresting tale of a bridge, judged by him to be safe, which had gone down five minutes after (or was it before?) he had tested it. England told at great length a harrowing recital of the loss and recovery of one of his own pictures, which some presumably bad judge of painting had stolen. To impart a little life to the gathering, I told a very good story, thoroughly original, about stopping at an inn on the slopes of the Black Forest Mountains. How I had not liked the landlord's appearance, and how he very nearly robbed and murdered me, but for my presence of mind in leaving the inn next morning. Strange to say, this story also fell flat, and so we asked Britton for a tale. He smiled sadly and puffed away at his pipe.

"Ah, well," said he. "You fellows may laugh, but I've had one stirring adventure in my time, young as I am." (It is hardly necessary for me to state that Britton's discoveries in brain-physiology had won him his D.Sc. of London University at the age of twenty-six, and that his further successes had given him world-wide fame.) "I have never told this to any one before," went on Britton, "as I've always felt rather nervous about it. But it's five years ago now, so I think I'll venture, if you care to listen. Charge your pipes, please. There's some latakia here, if you care to try it."

"It was just after I got my D.Sc. I went straight to Leipzig to study under Virhoff. I had good recommendations from Crane, Thompson, and other big lights. Taking one thing with another I felt on good terms with myself when I stepped out of the train at the Schlosswein terminus. I first hunted for lodgings, but they all seemed full, till at last I turned down a street of dark tall houses, and in the window of one stood the welcome announcement that lodgings were to be let within. The place suited me admirably, especially as there was a large rambling room under the roof, which I saw at once would be the very thing for my laboratory. So I had my traps brought up, and was soon quite at home. Of course, I quickly

introduced myself to the great Virhoff. He was a man about seventy years of age, white-haired, venerable, and with a look of gentle and placid serenity on his face. He had, in fact, what you would call a thoroughly benevolent appearance, and a child would trust him at first sight. I can't tell you how kindly he received me, or how quickly he put me at my ease. He soon got me to talk to him about my work, and I could see he was surprised at its extent. I went home highly delighted with my reception, as you may suppose. I had looked for some soured old votary of science, and lo, a genial old philanthropist.

"During the next six months I worked hard, and found the benefit of such teaching as Virhoff could undoubtedly give. On certain phases of brain-physiology, he was sublime, and would have inspired a clod. Now, all this time, I was busy in my spare moments on the 'medulla oblongata,' and its functions, and I thought something might come of my researches in that direction, though, truth to say, I had very hazy notions about what *did* come at last. But I was very shy about this private work of mine, and although I talked freely enough with my master on other topics, I did not say anything about my pet subject. Looking back now, I can think of no other reason than shyness.

"One day, however, after an unusually brilliant lecture of Virhoff's, I waited for him, and we sauntered slowly down the street together, his arm resting affectionately in mine. Neither spoke for some time, so at last he said playfully: 'Well, my young friend, you seem dull to-day. Is it that you are in what you English call "a brown study?"' 'I was thinking,' said I, moved to sudden confidence, 'of some researches I have been recently making.' 'Ah yes,' said he inquiringly, 'in what direction?' 'Well, master,' I replied: 'I have been doing what many men before have tried to do; that is, find out the precise functions of the medulla oblongata.' As I said the words, I felt my arm violently pressed by that of the old man, as if he had felt a sudden electric shock. I looked up in surprise. 'Pardon me,' he said: 'it is a slight affection of the heart to which I am subject. You were saying——' 'But, master,' I replied, 'this is dangerous. Have you consulted anyone?' 'No! no!' he cried impatiently. 'Don't think any more about it. You were saying something about some little researches of yours. You must let me come to see your laboratory. Perhaps I may be able to give you some hints.' I thanked him effusively, and we bade farewell at the corner of my street.

"A few weeks passed away, and I was getting feverishly anxious. My experiments were turning out even more successful than I had hoped, and light was beginning to dawn on me. I saw the goal of my hopes very near at hand. I strove hard to be methodical in my work, and each series of experiments, whether ultimately successful or not, was duly entered in a separate note-book. Virhoff, in the meanwhile, had been, if possible, kinder to me than ever, and it was

evident, I think, to all, that I was his pet pupil. One day he said to me: 'Well, dear pupil, and how go the researches? I must call in this evening and see your little workshop, is it not so?' I told him I should be only too honoured, and it was arranged that he would call in about seven o'clock, on his way home from a friend's house.

"As I sat, just when dusk was coming on, smoking a solitary pipe, a modification of my latest experiment suddenly came into my head. It was a startling idea and I rushed into my laboratory and plunged at once *in medias res*. For some time I worked in silence, expectation at fever-point. Suddenly I dropped my scalpel, and drew a long breath. I had finished! My work was over, and the discovery was made. My brain was all in a whirl, and I had hardly self-control enough to note down the final result, and how it was obtained, in my note-book, which I then put in my pocket. The cathedral clock struck seven at that moment, and a knock was heard at my laboratory door. I went to open it, and found my master waiting outside. 'What!' he cried. 'You seem excited, carried out of yourself (do not the English speak so?). You are kind to be thus overjoyed to see the old master.' The people of the house had told him I was up-stairs, and he had found his way to the laboratory by a sort of instinct. I took him affectionately by the arm and made him sit down, though he was very hale and active in his movements, and would have shamed many a young man of twenty or thirty. His eyes wandered inquisitively round the room, and at length he said: 'But come, I am going to look round.' I smiled, and my heart beat at the news I was presently going to give him. How glad he would be! How he would wring my hand and beam upon me! Virhoff had his back to me, and was bending down over some papers, when suddenly I heard him utter a sort of choking gasp, and I saw his whole body shake convulsively. I rushed to his side, and he looked round at me with a face white as the dead. His lips moved, but no sound came from them, and still he stared at me with glassy, horror-stricken eyes. 'What is it, dear master?' I cried in fear. 'Is it that heart-pain again?' The sound of my voice seemed to bring him somewhat to himself, and he staggered to a chair, holding a paper in his hand. 'Yes, yes,' he muttered hoarsely, 'the pain in my heart—so bad.' I gave him some brandy, and he soon grew more life-like, though I could see he had had a great shock. 'I must go home,' he said. I expostulated in vain, but when I found he was determined, I rose to accompany him; but to my surprise, he would not let me go any farther with him than my sitting-room door. 'Go in and sit down!' said he. 'Don't take any notice of me. I like it better so. Sit down and close the door. I will go down alone.' I could but obey, and I heard his steps going downstairs, and then the clang of the hall-door as it closed upon him. He had dropped the paper on my landing, and I had mechanically picked it up. I now looked at it, and found it was one of my concluding experiments, the result of which I had scribbled down hastily, before noting in my book.

"I slept very badly that night, what with one thing and another, and I remember very well getting up to feel if my precious note-book was safe. Then I got back into bed again. But my discovery and its results haunted me.

"At last, out of all patience, I got up, put on my dressing-gown, and determined to go to my laboratory, and take a look round, thinking by this means to settle my mind. I accordingly took a box of matches, and moved softly, with slipper-shod feet, along the corridor. What was my astonishment to see a light faintly shining under the laboratory door! Some one was in there. I first thought of thieves, but at once scouted the idea. What could thieves want in such a place? I listened breathlessly at the keyhole, and distinctly heard somebody moving about, and once I thought I heard an impatient sigh. I am not very muscular, but still, this was an intrusion on my 'holy of holies,' and I determined, if the door was unlocked, to rush in and catch the intruder if possible. I put my hand on the knob, but must have made some slight noise in doing so, for the light was instantly extinguished. In I dashed, but fell prostrate over a chair which had been cleverly placed at the entrance. Something brushed past me in the darkness, rushed through the door, and downstairs. It did not take me very long to jump up, and follow the nocturnal visitant, arousing the house at the same time by my cries. But as I got to the top of the bottom flight of stairs, I heard the bolt of the hall-door shot back, and I just got to the street in time to see a cloaked figure running with incredible swiftness forty or fifty yards away. It was impossible for me, clad as I was, to pursue it, so my landlord and I, after thoroughly searching every corner of the house, and finding no clue to the mystery, decided to go back to bed once more, and acquaint the police with my adventure in the morning.

"Morning came, and with it a kind letter from Professor Virhoff, telling me that his indisposition made it impossible for him to lecture, and inviting me to come to his house in the afternoon, and 'I was to be sure,' said the letter, 'to bring with me any notes I might have made on the functions of the medulla oblongata, as he wished to see how far I had gone in the study of that organ.'

"I passed my morning in the laboratory, verifying, examining each link in my chain of causation, and looking eagerly for any possible source of error. No, all was safe enough, and my blood coursed quickly through my veins, as I thought of the reputation I had made for myself, and of the dear ones at home—how glad they would be! I ate my lunch in a dream, and was actually on my way to the professor's, when I suddenly remembered that I had left my precious note-book behind me. I hastily ran back, snatched it up from an experimenting-table, and made the best of my way to my master's house, knowing that he much disliked unpunctuality.

"He received me warmly, but I still fancied that his face was a trifle pale, and that his hand shook. This latter fact was brought to

my notice by his letting a wine-glass fall after dinner. He had just raised it to his lips, when I said, 'Now, master, I have a wonderful piece of news for you, and I want you to drink to my health. I have discovered the true function of the medulla oblongata.'

"Hardly had the words left my lips when his wine-glass dropped to the ground. I rang the bell for the servant, at the professor's request, and in turning to do so faced a small mirror on the wall. I saw Virhoff's face reflected for one brief instant; and such an awful look of malignant hatred as was then depicted on it I never wish to see again. I turned hastily round, and could not but believe that my eyes had played me false, for there he sat, smiling gently as before. He began to talk at once, expressing, as I thought he would, great gladness at my news, 'though,' said he, 'I can hardly yet credit it, even from you, my dear young friend.' He got up, and proposed that we should take our cigars and adjourn to his laboratory, where we could discuss matters in a more scientific atmosphere, as it were. 'Of course, you brought your notes of work with you,' added he.

"I told him that I had, and we went down a long flight of steps and along one or two passages till we came to our destination. It was, in reality, a large cellar, which had been turned to scientific use, and was fitted up with all the latest improvements. My mouth watered, so to speak, at the splendid apparatus around me. The best of instruments—electric batteries of all sizes—first-rate operating-tables; in fact, I had never seen so perfect an equipment. A large globe, hanging from the ceiling, gave out brilliant electric rays, and smaller lights were near each working-bench.

"We stepped inside, and, to my surprise, Virhoff locked the door behind us and put the key in his pocket. After showing me his treasures he clapped me cordially on the shoulder, and said, 'Now, dear pupil, you shall sit on this operating-table. I will sit on the chair here in front of you—quite at home, eh?—and you shall tell me all about your discovery! Up you get; ha, ha! how droll to see you sitting up there!'

"I laughed myself, though there was something in his manner, I know not what, which seemed strained and unnatural. Accordingly I perched on the table, Virhoff sitting in front of me, smiling fixedly. 'First let me see your notes, will you?' said he. I handed him my note-book silently. 'Sit still,' said he, 'don't move.' Hardly had he said the words, when I felt a shock, and knew that a strong electric current was passing through me. I was powerless to move. 'Ha, ha! young friend, dear young friend!' said Virhoff. 'You feel the thrill; is it not so? Listen, O great discoverer. By pressing this knob, which you see here, I make an end of you, sure and safe; and that is what I am presently going to do. You baby-faced fool! You English devil! Shall chance put into your hands what I, Virhoff, have spent my life trying to discover? / it was whom you surprised last night! I opened your hall-door after I left you,

shut it (myself being inside) and then crept back and hid in your laboratory ! At night I tried to find out if you had discovered the secret for which I had toiled in vain, for I guessed from the paper that you must be on a right track. But I could find nothing, so I have brought you and your discovery here, and I mean to kill *you* and keep *it*. My work is meat and drink to me, it is the blood, the life of my heart ! hissed he ; his face transformed by rage into that of a demon. ‘ You—you boy, is it fit that you should by accident find out what has been to me the work of hours and hours of secret toil ? No, dear young friend, you have only one more discovery to make, and that will be when I once more press the knob, and then you will be dead, dear pupil, dead ! How droll ! ’ and he laughed shrilly.

“ The sweat came out on my brow. My soul froze with horror under the malevolent eye of the maniac, for such I judged him to be. ‘ You will disappear, vanish ! ’ continued he. ‘ No one shall learn your fate ; and I, Virhoff, will have what is rightfully my own ! ’ So saying, he quickly opened the note-book and dashed hastily over the pages. For a few minutes no sound was heard save his hurried breathing. I was too faint with fear to say one word. Suddenly he uttered an exclamation of surprise and disgust, and threw the book down. ‘ But—but,’ stammered he ; ‘ you have discovered nothing. It is all wrong, all quite wrong,’ and he paced backwards and forwards in uncontrollable agitation. At last he stopped, clapped his hands to his side, and laughed loudly in a very forced manner. ‘ Ha, ha ! ’ shouted he, ‘ what a jest ! I believe the boy thinks I am in earnest ! See ! ’ and he pressed another knob. The electric circuit was broken, and I jumped down from the table, free once more. ‘ You must allow the old man his joke,’ said he, still laughing nervously. ‘ See here is your book. Come and let us have some more wine.’

“ But I was still terribly frightened, and I am not ashamed to own it. I cannot tell with what relief I followed Virhoff upstairs. He still laughed and talked volubly, praying me not to be offended at his ill-timed jest. I could hardly answer him, and took the first opportunity of bidding him good-night. How blessed seemed the free air of heaven, playing on my hot brow ! My thoughts were still in a riotous maze of confusion. One idea kept coming to me, however. What had he meant by saying that I had made no discovery ? Had he then detected some error, some weak point ? I found out, gentlemen, when I got home, the answer to the enigma, and the cold sweat came to my brow once more, when I saw that my life had been saved by my having, in my hurry, put the wrong book in my pocket when I went to Virhoff’s.

“ Next day I published my discovery, and the day afterwards the newspapers announced the suicide of ‘ the eminent Professor Virhoff—a man renowned alike for his scientific discoveries, and for his unfailing goodness of heart and benignity of demeanour.’ ”

W. FRANCIS.

THEODORE HOOK.

IT is now eighty-two years since that great and most terrible and often since plagiarised joke was played off on London by the subject of this sketch. Two friends were walking down Berners Street in 1809. One unfortunately called the attention of the other to a neat and modest house, the residence of some decent tradesman's widow.

"I'll lay you a guinea that in one week that small mansion shall be the most celebrated in town," was the reply.

The bet was taken. The plot began and thickened. Within four days one thousand letters were dispatched with orders to every imaginable shop, all to be executed on one day and as nearly as could be at one fixed hour. From waggons of coal and potatoes and barrels of beer, the commands extended to ice and ices and fruit of all descriptions. Clothes, bonnets, feathers, in fact, nothing useful to mankind was forgotten. The Governor of the Bank of England, the Chairman of the East India Company, a Lord Chief Justice, a Cabinet Minister; above all the Archbishop of Canterbury, and his Royal Highness the Commander-in-Chief, all had been cunningly and judiciously appealed to, and all obeyed the summons, while the perpetrator, who had secured a lodging on the other side of the way, stood and surveyed the scene. The Duke of York's military punctuality and crimson liveries brought him into Berners Street before the poor widow's astonishment had risen to terror and dismay, and revealed to the on-looker something of the danger and iniquity of the plot he had laid and carried out. Lest he should be discovered, or suspected, he found it convenient to be laid up for a fortnight with severe illness, which necessitated a change to the country on recovery. Hook was suspected however amongst his theatrical friends, but knowing that suspicion would, in such a great and general uproar of indignation, mean very serious consequences they were faithful to his interests and kept silence, while doctors, attorneys, teachers, tailors and tradesmen vociferated and cursed. Horses fell by the score never to rise again, goods were smashed and lost and stolen. Such a field day had never been seen in London before. It was indeed well that the perpetrator of this hoax was not discovered; well for him. His stay in the country was an agreeable one, but he did not go far. He liked to be as near the "little village" as possible when he could.

He and his friend Mathews were again together, fishing on this occasion, when their attention was attracted by a board warning off intruders under strictest penalties of the law from the sacred

precincts of a Richmond villa demesne. Another bet was made and taken. In a moment the pair had landed, just because they were most strictly forbidden to do so, and the exquisite lawn, the hidden paradise, became the arena of a surveyor. Mathews carried the fishing cord, now converted into a measuring tape, this and a walking stick were soon pinned into the soft turf, while Hook, pencil and book in hand, walked gravely to and fro. Of course the irate alderman quickly appeared, napkined to the chin, and fresh from his dining-table. Hook received him and his inquiries with cool indifference. As agents of the canal company, as he finally announced, they must, of course, he and his clerk, arrange where the new cut was to cross the old gentleman's pleasure.

The listener's jaw fell as he contemplated the prospective destruction of his lovely Richmond villa. Could nothing be done to avert such a calamity as this? Would not the gentlemen walk in and talk the matter over? The officials expressed civil regret, but duty was duty. However, after some demur, they consented to go indoors, although they saw no use whatever in consultation. The turkey was just served; they allowed themselves to be induced to take a slice each; in fact, after much consideration and consultation of watches, to partake of a very excellent dinner. The madeira was prime. There was a bottle of pink champagne, a gift from my Lord Mayor. The claret was excellent. The city knight waxed eloquent about the projected canal; "but one bottle more, dear gentlemen, before you go, and you will promise to use your influence with the company on my behalf, will you not?"

At this juncture, Hook suddenly burst into song and related the whole transaction in those extempore verses for which he was so famous. We may imagine how the alderman's jaw fell again as the winding-up stanza was reached.

"And we greatly approve of your fare,
Your cellar's as prime as your cook;
And this clerk here is Mathews the player,
And I'm—Mr. Theodore Hook."

[*Exeunt.*]

Hook was born in the same year as Lord Byron and Sir Robert Peel, and was at Harrow at the same time as they were, although not in their form. Unfortunately he was removed from school-life and from all discipline at the very time when repression and training were most necessary for the formation of his character. When possessed with the idea of a joke or hoax of any kind, he never hesitated about its perpetration or allowed the thought of consequences to moderate his fun. One of his chief victims was an old Mr. Hill, of whom it was once said it was impossible to discover his age, the parish register having been burnt in the fire of London. "Pooh, pooh!" cried Hook, "he's one of the little Hills spoken of as skipping in the Psalms."

Theodore's father was a clever composer and musician, who enjoyed, in his day, some renown. He was twice married, and his first wife was the mother of two boys with a gap of eighteen years between them. She died when Theodore was yet a small child, and with her died the clever boy's prospects. His father discovered early that Theodore had a charming voice, a correct ear, a turn for composition and improvisation, and that he could be of much use in making up the librettos for new operettas. He was accordingly allowed to discontinue his studies, was petted and idolised at home, and launched into the arena of the green-room, where, being exceedingly handsome and charmingly attractive, he was spoiled to his heart's content. His sensible brother, the Dean of later days, made one effort to check this mad career. Having induced his father to consent that Theodore should be trained for the bar, he accompanied the youth to Oxford for his matriculation. The Vice-Chancellor, noting the stripling's boyish appearance, said :

" You seem very young, sir ; are you prepared to sign the Thirty-nine Articles ? "

" Oh yes, sir," was the brisk reply, " quite ready ; forty, if you please."

The dignitary shut the book, but the boy looked contrite, the brother apologised ; finally the ceremony was gone through, and that was about all Oxford saw of the future treasurer of the Mauritius.

It is believed that England never before or since could boast of so great an improvisatore as Hook, and in this character, as in every other social function, his company was ardently sought and admired, even in the very highest circles in the land, not excluding royalty itself. He usually accompanied himself upon the piano, and took for the theme of his songs or mimic operas the trifling occurrences or topics discussed or alluded to during the course of the entertainment he attended on the occasion ; he would even weave in things happening while he sang. Every variety of metre or complication of verse was called into his service. After one such evening Coleridge enthusiastically declared his friend Theodore was in his way as great a genius as Dante.

Hook published a novel called ' Gilbert Gurney,' which is practically a narrative of his own strange and chequered life. In it he relates his first and last experiences at the Old Bailey. His friend, Methuselah Hill, introduced him to the sheriff, who gave our hero that memorable invitation to eat marrow puddings in the pithy form, " We hang at eight, breakfast at nine, sir." Hook went, and to his horror recognised, amongst the culprits led out, a young man he had often laughed and talked with in theatrical circles. This unhappy person recognised his old acquaintance at the Debtor's Door. " Good morning, Mr. Hook, and—good-bye, sir." Hook was deeply affected.

With all his aplomb as an improvisator, Hook was not proof against stage fright, which he compares to sea-sickness. Nevertheless, he

made an admirable actor when he chose to go on the boards, and on one occasion hoaxed the public with a prologue purposely unintelligible, except as to the first and last word of each line. The applause was great, but one old gentleman was overheard to say "excellent, but abominably inarticulate."

Sheridan it was who introduced Hook to the upper circles of society, first to the Marchioness of Hertford, who so lauded his delightful talents that he had next the honour of supping with the Regent in Manchester Square. In 1812 it was decided that something must be done for such a delightful creature, and he was appointed Accountant-General and Treasurer to the Mauritius, with a salary and allowances worth nearly £2000 a year. He spent five years in this delightful colony, which he describes in writing to his friend Mathews as a Paradise: "with women all handsome, and natives who dance like devils, all the better for that their minds are blank; because, as every one knows, the greater the fool the better the dancer!"

But a great deal of this letter is well worthy of transcription. "This whole island," he says, "is like fairy-land; every hour seems happier than the last; the mildness of the air (the sweetness of which as it passes over spice plantations and orange groves is scarcely conceivable), the clearness of the atmosphere, the coolness of the evenings and the loveliness of the place itself all combine to render it fascinating. The very thought of quitting it is like the apprehension of death. We have operas in the winter, which sets in about July, an excellent beef-steak club and the best Freemason's lodge in the world. At the last Government-house ball, upwards of seven hundred and fifty ladies were present, which, considering that the greater proportion of the female population are *not admissible*, proves the extent of our society. But, my dear fellow, fresh butter is ten shillings the pound; a coat costs thirty pounds English money, a pair of gloves fifteen shillings; well, and to continue, a bottle of the best claret tenpence, while pine-apples are one penny each."

If he was delighted with the island, so was the island with him, and no wonder. He was but twenty-five on arriving there, and had been considered about the most fascinating and entertaining man in Europe. However, in 1817, the Governor had occasion to leave for England, and there was a commission appointed to examine into and take over the accounts and contents of the Treasury so that all might be in order for the Deputy-Governor just sworn into office.

The Commissioners signed a report dated 19th November, stating all was as it should be, and the Governor sailed. However, in less than two months, one of the Treasury clerks wrote to the Deputy-Governor declaring that a grave error really existed, as no credit had been given for a sum of 37,000 dollars paid in, as he knew, fifteen months before. General Hall at once communicated with Mr. Hook, and appointed another commission. The clerk Allan was examined and held to his statement, explaining his previous silence by saying he

wished to avoid collision with his superior. He wrote very strange and incoherent letters one after another, and finally, before the new commission sat he shot himself, leaving a final statement that Hook had tampered with him, and had offered him a heavy bribe to leave the island.

The messenger, however, who had, as he declared, taken him this offer, denied the whole affair on oath strenuously. To this day the matter remains a mystery. Had Allan a spite against his chief or did he speak the truth? On fresh examination certain irregularities, discrepancies and omissions did appear in the Treasury books, but they were not invariably by any means to Hook's advantage in pecuniary gains; rather to his loss; on one occasion, certainly. Nevertheless, he was manifestly an unfit official for his post, and there was a large deficit, something like £12,000, in all probability brought about by carelessness quite as much as by the wanton and criminal extravagance he was at once accused of. He was arrested as he supped with a friend, and was dragged by torch-light through the streets and thrown into the common prison, which consisted just then of one wretched cell, the remainder of the building having been recently burnt down. After a few days he was handed over to a military detachment and embarked for England to be tried for "his crimes."

It now all seems an unjust and miserable affair, and so it seemed then and ever to the bewildered young man, so suddenly thrown from the height of happiness to the depths of distress. All his personal property was taken from him and sold. A grateful slave bought in his writing-desk for ten shillings and brought it to him as a gift before he sailed. The voyage was a most unhappy one of nine long months. For four weeks they were tossing about the Cape of Good Hope in a hurricane, being reduced for much longer than that period to an allowance of half a pound of mouldy biscuits and half a pint of water daily. They stopped en route at St. Helena, and Hook, who was already a prime favourite on board, was allowed to land and visit Napoleon, of whose *levée* and ante-room he later on made excellent sketches, describing the ex-emperor's uncouth obesity and dismal sulkiness of visage as "Fatty, late Boney." Here he met Lord Charles Somerset on his way to assume the Cape Governorship. Knowing nothing of Hook's arrest, he said :

"I hope, sir, you are not going home for your health?"

"Well, my lord," replied Theodore, "they do say there is something wrong about the chest."

On reaching England, the Attorney-General, on inquiring into the case, reported that there was certainly no ground for a criminal procedure, and as for the rest they must await the scrutiny of the Audit Board, which scrutiny dragged on for five years.

Hook's palmy days were over, although during the ensuing years of his life he made more money than he ever did before. Had he used some of that money to clear off even in part the debt he was accused

of owing and which remained ever as a stain and blot upon his name and honour, it would no doubt have been better for him, but this he refused to do; nay, even when again arrested for the debt and kept in prison for over two years, and when a friend offered to assist him with a portion of the money, he rejected the idea of making any payment. His personal assets brought his creditors in but some forty pounds.

Things dragged on thus wearily until finally the Crown abandoned its claim, and he was set at liberty; but the confinement had permanently damaged his health and personal appearance. He came out of the King's Bench pale and flabby in face and with a corpulent figure. He thus describes himself a little later on to Mr. Gleig, the chaplain of Chelsea Hospital: "Well, you see me as I am, all the bucklings and paddings, and washings and brushings gone—dropt for ever, a poor old grey-haired man," and yet he died when but fifty years of age.

He lived a hard and harassing life in those later years, always, too, carrying about with him the weight of that Treasury debt. As of old, he was again the darling of society. No fashionable assemblage was complete without his presence, and although his literary earnings were enormous, his expenses exceeded them. He had also entangled himself in domestic embarrassment of a nature distressing to himself and to his best friends. His diary, in these latter days, while interesting in the extreme as a record of passing events of his own inner life, and of the sayings and doings of the great people he lived amongst, is sad and distressing. "Still hoping at fifty," so he writes in 1839. Two years later he was buried in Fulham Churchyard.

Alice Quarry.



"THE LAND O' THE LEAL."

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH."

IT was a wild night : a cutting, cold north-east wind was raging, bringing with it at intervals heavy storms of hail and rain and sleet, which beat against the latticed windows of Rowsley Manor House, and the weather-wise prophesied the surrounding peaks of the Derbyshire hills would be capped with snow in the morning.

The house stood by itself on a hill about a mile from the village ; it was surrounded by great trees ; a group of Scotch firs stood close to the back of the house, and frequently at night the owls could be heard hooting in these trees. They were doing so this Christmas Eve, and in the pauses of the wind's fury their weird melancholy notes rent the air ; then the storm-wind drowned their sad song, and the hail and rain beat violently on the roof and against the curtained windows.

Inside, the house was well-warmed and lighted ; music was heard in the drawing-room, and, best music of all, children's happy voices and merry laughter were heard all over the house, for they were playing hide-and-seek. One room only, the library, was forbidden them ; and here a man and a girl, knowing it was the only place in the house where they would not be interrupted, had taken refuge.

They were both young. She was the eldest child of the house, he was her accepted lover ; he was tall and strong, she small and fragile, looking as if a puff of wind would blow her away ; but she was not really delicate. She was tired this evening, for they had been on their bicycles a great part of the day, and she was easily affected by the weather, and the uncanny night outside made her nervous. Indeed, the mood of both was set in a minor key this evening, for he had just received orders to hold himself in readiness to join his regiment the following week. One of those small African wars was raging at the time, and his battalion was ordered to the front : this in itself was exactly what he desired, but it was hard to part from Cicely Rivers, and perhaps the storm affected him also.

At any rate, they were both rather overwrought ; and perhaps that was why they entered into a compact this Christmas Eve which at another time would have struck them both as superstitious and foolish.

It was Cicely's idea.

"Oh, Rex, suppose you should be killed ! "

"My darling, we can die but once ; I should be killed, that is all.

"Oh, don't talk in that dreadfully calm way! Besides, it is not all; if you were killed, I should die of grief, I am quite sure I should!"

"Cicely, don't—I can't bear to hear you talk of dying!"

"It is not a very cheerful subject, certainly; but it is not a cheerful night—just listen to the wind howling; and the owls are hooting, and the villagers always say it means bad luck."

"That is nonsense! You are nervous to night, my Cicely; I wish you could come with me—you are as brave as a lion really."

"I am not brave about you. I hate your going, Rex. I want you to promise me something. If you should be killed in that dreadful war, will you promise to come to me here in this room about this time next Christmas Eve?"

"My dear child, how can I if I am killed?"

"Your spirit can, of course, and that is what I mean. Will you promise?"

He would have promised anything with her little hands on his shoulders and her grey eyes looking appealingly into his blue ones.

"Yes, I promise; but you know, Cicely, it won't depend upon me. Neither you nor I know much about the conditions of life on the other side of that dark little river we all have to cross some day; but I promise faithfully, if the Commanding Officer on the other side of the grave gives me leave, I will come. But are you sure it would not frighten you?"

"Quite—I could not be afraid of you, Rex, dead or alive; and if—if anything dreadful should happen to you, it would give me something to live for, if I were sure of seeing you next Christmas Eve. I can't bear to think this is perhaps the last we shall ever spend together!"

"Don't think it, my darling! Of course it is on the cards, but it is no use anticipating evils," said Mr. Carlton.

"Not the least, and I am a selfish little creature to suggest such possibilities. Let us go and dance; but you will keep your promise, won't you?"

"I promise and vow that I will, if I am allowed. And I'll tell you what I will do, Cicely, that you may be sure it is myself: I will whistle the 'Land o' the Leal' outside before I come in, to assure you you need not be frightened."

The promise and vow required ratifying; and when this ceremony had been duly performed, they joined the party assembled in the drawing-room, where, owing to the game of hide-and-seek, their absence had not been remarked.

A week later and Rex Carlton was on his way to the seat of war, and Cicely was left at home to scan the papers anxiously every day in fear and trembling lest his name should appear among the killed or wounded.

It was a longer business than had been anticipated, and spring and summer were over and autumn set in before the war was ended. Then there came a day in September when the papers were kept

from Cicely, and the old clergyman of the parish, who had baptised her as an infant, was sent for to break to her the news which no one else had the courage to tell.

Reginald Carlton, first-lieutenant of a certain regiment, was killed in battle on the 20th of September.

Then there was weeping and wailing at the Manor House ; and then Cicely was so ill they feared she would not recover. But the recuperative powers of youth are strong, and at the end of November she returned from Brighton, whither she had been sent when convalescent, apparently quite well in health, but an altered girl. She was naturally rather reserved ; and her mother was not surprised when, on her return, the only allusion she ever made to her trouble was to beg that *his* name might never be mentioned in her presence.

As Christmas approached she seemed possessed by some feverish anxiety—appeared to be anticipating some great happiness ; but no one dared to question her on the subject, although her family were very anxious about her. The doctor was consulted ; but he forbade any mention of Rex Carlton to be made to her ; she was evidently still suffering acutely, and was, in his opinion, best left to herself.

She was not selfish in her grief ; she begged that for the sake of the others Christmas might be kept as usual, even if she took but little part in its celebration ; and, rather to her surprise, her request was acceded to, and preparations for the Christmas festivities were on a larger scale than usual this year.

On the morning of Christmas Eve Cicely scarcely touched her breakfast ; a hectic flush was in her cheeks, and her grey eyes were bright with suppressed excitement. She was in a very restless mood all day, but went about her accustomed duties, decorating the church and distributing gifts in the village as she always had done on the vigil of Christmas Day. In the evening she dressed herself for dinner with unusual care. She wore deep mourning, but put some holly-berries in her hair and dress, and some gold ornaments Rex had given her on her arms and throat. Her engagement-ring she had never removed.

After dinner she escaped to the library, and sat down by the fire. The room was a cheerful one, particularly at night, when it was lighted by electric light, and when, as now, huge logs crackled on the dogs in the large old-fashioned fireplace. There was nothing ghostly about the room, and no one would have thought there was any chance of a ghost visiting it that evening except Cicely ; and she, trusting in her lover's promise, was fully persuaded he would come.

"If he does not, I shall not believe there is another world at all ; I shall believe we all go out like a candle when we die ; for I am certain if Rex can keep his promise he will," she thought, as she sat watching the fire.

They were wicked thoughts, she knew—bad thoughts and bad logic; but she was young and passionate and broken-hearted, and perhaps as time went on and her pain grew less, better thoughts would come even if Rex broke his promise.

It was a calm, clear moonlight night this year, cold and frosty, but fine. Now and then the owls broke the silence of the night, but otherwise all was still out-of-doors; andindoors the distant laughter and merry voices of the children and young people from time to time reached the library where Cicely sat waiting for Rex to keep his tryst.

She gazed absently at the blazing wood, filled with many emotions, of which desire to see her lover once more was the most predominant; but curiosity certainly played a considerable part in her feelings, and fear was not altogether absent; but this last gave a piquancy to the situation: it was like "scorching" downhill on her bicycle. She was, as Rex had said, a brave little thing, and she asked herself more than once why she should be afraid of Rex dead when she was not afraid of him living.

Presently she remembered his coming was to be heralded by the strains of "*The Land o' the Leal*," and unconsciously she began to hum the tune; then after a while she sang the words softly:

"I'm wearing awa', Jean,
To the land o' the leal!"

Suddenly from outside the window she heard a man whistling the melancholy refrain of that most plaintive air. She sprang up from her seat and rushed to the window, pulled back the heavy curtains, and stood in the big bay, looking out into the moonlight; but the whistling grew softer and softer, as though the whistler were going away, and she could see no one.

"It was Rex—I am certain it was his whistle! Oh! why has he gone away? Rex—Rex! come back—I am not frightened! Cicely is waiting—come to her!"

She rushed back into the room, where she began to speak, and threw herself into her chair, and sobbed out the last few sentences, ending with a flood of tears. When the fit was over she dried her eyes, and lay back exhausted and disappointed, but not in the least frightened; there was nothing ghost-like about the whistling—it was just like Rex whistling as she had heard him a hundred times in his lifetime.

"It was no dream; I was wide awake, and it was his whistle, I am certain of that! Oh! why can't he come and let me see him? Hark! there it is again!"

This time the whistling was in the corridor outside the library; it was very faint at first, but it came nearer and grew louder, and Cicely jumped out of her chair and flung the door wide open; but now the whistling stopped, and her heart began to beat wildly, and she half sat, half leaned against the table for support, facing the open door.

"Rex! Come to me! I am not afraid—I won't be afraid!" she said aloud in a tone of supplication, as if she were praying.

The whistling began again, first low, then louder and louder; now footsteps came closer and closer, and a noise like the clattering of an officer's sword as he walks.

"He will be in uniform, as he was when he died," thought Cicely, never for one moment doubting it was he. "Come quickly!" she exclaimed, with her hand to her heart to still its throbs.

The next moment Rex Carlton stood in the doorway in full uniform. He was bronzed, but he looked otherwise just as he had done when she last saw him alive.

"Are you frightened, dearest?" he said gently, as he paused on the threshold.

"No, no, no! Rex, Rex, Rex! Come—come closer!" gasped Cicely, pale as death, her looks belying her words.

"There is no need to fear, darling. It is your own true Rex," he said, coming closer, but not yet within arm's-length of her.

"My own love! You do not look ill, darling," said Cicely.

"I am not ill, dearest."

"Are you happy?"

"Intensely!" And as he spoke, he looked down longingly at the little pale face raised so pathetically to his.

"You do not look as dead people look," said Cicely, gazing lovingly at his dear familiar features.

"I am not dead; I am very much alive," he answered, smiling.

"Yes—I forgot. Death is the beginning of life, they say. Do not go! Do not go! How long can you stay? Till the clock strikes twelve?" And she clasped her hands together, and bent towards him.

"Till you bid me go. I can stay as long as you will have me."

"What do you mean, Rex? What do you mean?" exclaimed the girl in a bewildered tone.

There were other sounds in the corridor now—stealthy steps and hushed voices; but Cicely was too absorbed with the vision of Rex to hear or see any one but him.

"I mean what I say. I have kept my promise so as not to frighten you. Will you be afraid if I touch you? May I come nearer? I am really Rex; I am not my own ghost."

Still he dared not touch her till she gave him leave. The truth began to dawn upon her; but, at present, she had not grasped it fully. She was dazed; but there was a look in his eyes that overcame her fear, and she stepped forward.

The next moment he had caught her to his heart and was raining tears and kisses on her little pale face; and she, beginning to understand he was no ghost, clung close to him, sobbing for joy and murmuring incoherent expressions, which, fortunately, were only heard by Rex.

Then from the corridor came cheers and shouts of delight, and they all crowded into the library, and the boys sang, "He's a jolly good fellow!" and the girls danced round the lovers, and their elders wept for joy.

It was indeed Rex Carlton himself, and not his ghost. He had not even been wounded. It was a mistake, but one that they had not dared to tell Cicely owing to her serious illness when the good news arrived. When she recovered they feared the revulsion of feeling might bring on a relapse; and then Rex himself wrote and suggested that, if he kept his tryst, he might be able to announce his own safety without giving her a great shock.

It was a risky experiment; but she was evidently prepared to see him dead on Christmas Eve; so perhaps it would not frighten her to see him alive; and, as it turned out, it did not. There was a very happy Christmas at Rowsley Manor that year, and Cicely's favourite song was ever the "Land o' the Leal."

DARLEY DALE.

C O U N S E L.

FROM SULLY PRUDHOMME.

THE world, my child, is new and strange to you;
Your fancies flit like birds upon the wing;
You seek to taste the gladness of the spring;
You ask how to be gay and yet be true.

The secret this: prize but the purest gold,
Be all your thoughts, as are your garments, white;
Bloom like the violet that hides from sight,
Nor seek to shine that all men may behold.

Let your adornment but the emblem be
Of heartfelt ease and sweet tranquillity—
The guileless graces that the artless wear.

That, when returned from festive scenes and hours,
You lay aside the trinkets and the flowers,
You lose no whit of that which made you fair.

C. E. MEETKERKE.

ANGLO-INDIAN ANECDOTES.

TRANSCRIBED BY G. D. LYNCH.

'MANY years ago,' said my uncle, who was in a conversational mood, 'it was the custom for ladies who had any trouble with their servants to send the delinquent with a note to the 'collector,' or resident magistrate, who had the offender punished in a summary manner.'

'It happened upon one occasion that a lady, who had recently arrived from England, and was unaware of this custom, sent her Hindoo butler down to the collector with a note, inviting him to a dinner-party at her house that evening, his name having been accidentally omitted from the list of invitations which she had previously sent out. But the collector was busy in endeavouring to do justice in a case which he was trying, where the lies told by the witnesses for one party were only to be equalled by the lies told by the witnesses for the other party, and, not wishing to be disturbed, he laid the note aside to read it at his leisure. Then, when there came a slight pause in the proceedings, he beckoned to the chief of the police, and said to him, pointing at the same time to the butler, 'Take that man outside and give him a dozen.' Accordingly the butler, who was a most respectable although somewhat stout and pompous individual, was taken outside and severely chastised.'

'When the collector discovered his mistake, which was not until some time later, he soothed the outraged dignity and tender feelings of the unfortunate butler with a handful of rupees.'

After a hearty laugh over the misfortunes of the butler, my uncle lit what he was pleased to call a "trichy," or in other words, a Trichinopoli cigar, and, after a few puffs, proceeded to relate the following tale of a curious crocodile.

"At one time I had a friend staying with me up in the hills who was a very keen sportsman, but extremely near-sighted.

"One morning he went out by himself, and on the edge of a *nullah*, or pool of water, espied a crocodile. He crept up without disturbing the creature, and, after taking a steady aim, managed to bowl the monster over with a clean shot.

"When he ran up to it, however, he discovered to his horror that what he had mistaken for a crocodile was really an old woman whom he had killed, and presently, out of a hut close by, there came a native bewailing the loss of his wife. My friend was greatly distressed by his blunder, and after many expressions of sorrow, gave the man a handsome present by way of compensation for the loss of his wife, and left him.

"Some time afterwards, happening to be in the same district on

business, my friend was much surprised to observe a native bowing and salaaming before him whom he did not at first recognise, but who proved to be the husband of the old woman whom he had shot in mistake for a crocodile.

"Upon expressing a hope that the man had recovered the loss of his wife, the native replied, bowing and smiling all over his face, 'Me very happy now, sahib ; sahib quite welcome to shoot old woman, she no good ; sahib give me rupees, me buy young pretty wife ; me much obliged to sahib.'

"And I have no doubt that he was speaking the truth," continued my uncle as he got up to mix himself "a peg," which was his expression for a pretty stiff tumbler of brandy and soda-water. I remained silent, hoping he would recommence, and he did so.

"I remember," he said, "a rather amusing experience that happened to me once up-country. I put up for the night at the hotel of a respectable Portuguese named Paulo. It was a place which I had previously patronised, and I had a tender recollection of the excellency of its cuisine and its cellar.

"I went in to dinner, at which no one was present except a certain Captain Lusher, who told me that he was staying in the hotel.

"I had had a long ride and was very thirsty, so I told the waiter to bring me a pint of sherry with my soup. He brought the wine, and I poured out a glass and tossed it off. Great — But I won't repeat the exact words I said.

"I have never tasted anything so abominable in my life. I called up the waiter and told him to send the proprietor to me at once.

"When the latter arrived he was very apologetic, and declared that it was entirely owing to the fault of the waiter, who had given me Captain Lusher's sherry. In the meantime another bottle was placed on the table, which I found contained very excellent wine, and the rest of the dinner was quite up to Paulo's usual standard.

"During the dinner I noticed that the gallant Captain drank a good quantity of wine, in spite of his grumbling at its inferior quality, a fact which I was inclined to dispute.

"After dinner, Paulo said that he wanted to speak to me, and with tears in his eyes informed me that Captain Lusher had spent three months at his hotel, that he had never paid an *anna* of his bill, that he went to bed drunk every night, and that he could not get rid of him. 'I ask him to pay his bill,' said Paulo, 'but he no pay and no go ; then I say I charge him nossing for his tree months' stay, if he go now, but he no go. My wife say "make nasty his wine," and I put in turpentine, mustard, vinegar, all sorts of tings ; he drink it all the same and he no go.'

"The mystery of Captain Lusher's sherry was explained. I consoled Paulo as best I could, but it was another six weeks before they could induce Captain Lusher to move on."

